Looking Ahead . . .

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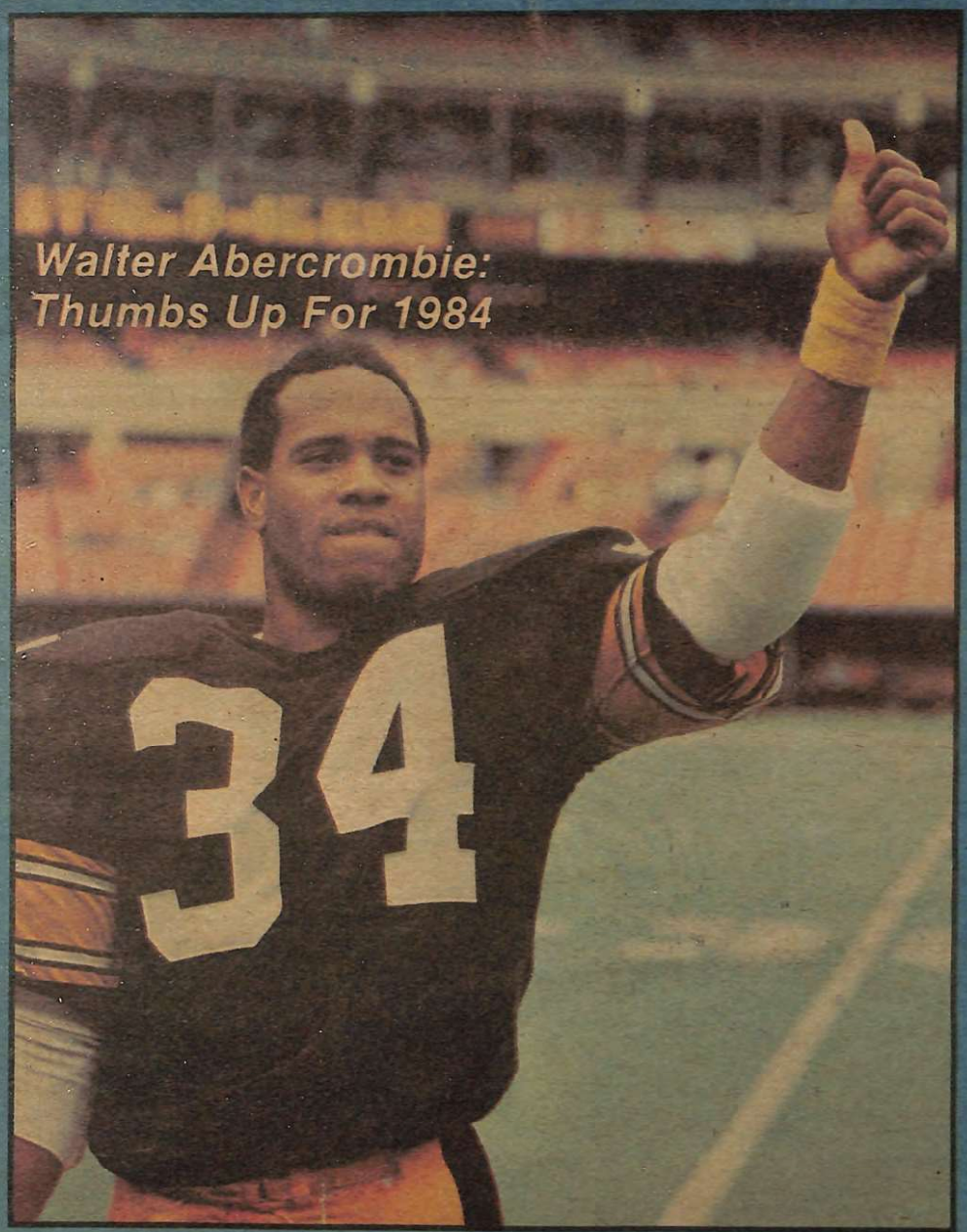
PITTSBURGH **Steelers** WEEKLY

Vol. 5, No. 24
April 1984



Walter Abercrombie: Thumbs Up For 1984

Lambert Upset By AFC's Poor Pro Bowl Performance
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The Rookies: Jury Still Out On Steeler First-Year Men
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Blitz: Steelers File Complaint Against City For New Lease
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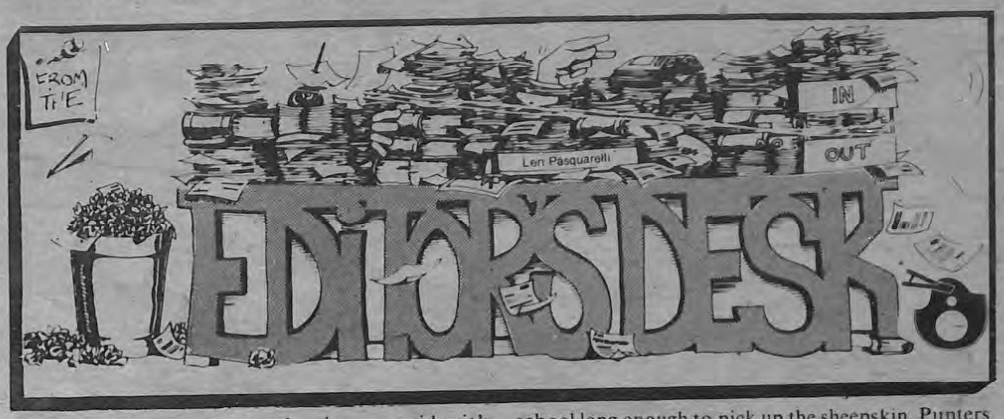

According to the people who are paid with taxpayer's dollars to sit around highly sensitive instrumentation to record such events, not to mention a telephone confirmation from an old friend who just recently removed himself and his household from one of the highest elevations in San Francisco simply because he could never quite reconcile himself to feeling sea sickness while both feet were still planted on terra firma, there were no earthquakes -- not even a tremor -- registered in California last week.

That is, unless you're one of the bigwigs from the NFL or the USFL.

You see, a federal judge ruled last week that, for all intents and purposes, the USFL's "rule" against signing undergraduate college players was a violation of this land's antitrust laws.

The USFL has never had such a rule, of course, though Chet Simmons, probably even under oath, would challenge that statement. Then again, Simmons' word being what it is, hardly anyone -- including most of the owners in his little league -- ever listens anyway.

You might recall the "special case" of one Herschel Walker; and you'll soon be reading about another similar case in Marcus "Was There Ever A Doubt I'd Be Headin' For The Bucks Soon" Dupree.

Doubtless, though, you've never heard of Bob Boris. Don't apologize. Save for Mr. and Mrs. Boris, some close friends and a cadre of legal types, few people have.

There are, I'm told by yet another friend -- it helps to have gone to a large Catholic high school whose graduates tend to heed literally the biblical admonition "go out and multiply," thereby giving me more than the normal quota of knowledgeable contacts -- even some University of Arizona season ticket holders who don't recall Boris. At least in a favorable light, that is.

That, folks, is saying something, since Boris once punted for ol' AU.

"He wasn't," my Arizona friend confided, "a very good punter. People here tended to measure his shank time. Looked good on the sidelines warming up, though. But really couldn't kick the ball a lick. Maybe that's why he quit."

Actually, Bob Boris "left school" in 1982. That was probably his first mistake. Boris failed to learn the Bad Punters' first rule of thumb: Always stick around school long enough to pick up the sheepskin. Punters who can't hang it for at least four seconds are in as much demand as one-legged sprinters in an Olympic year.

Boris didn't stop there, though. He just kept making mistakes. Hired himself an agent, of all things. Actually thought he had a shot at the pros. First off, he didn't. Secondly, by acquiring a mouthpiece, he relinquished whatever chance he had left of ever setting foot on a football field as an amateur, which, according to all reports, he was, in every sense of the word.

Unfortunately for Boris, every professional league -- yeah, even the USFL -- hires people to screen the *pro*spects from the *sus*pects. Boris was a suspect. Even the Canadian League didn't nibble. Of course, the CFL also has a rule about tampering with undergrads.

Bob Boris watched the Herschel Walker affair with interest. He sat by the phone and did a slow burn, walked out into the street, grabbed a couple of local kids to shag punts for a half hour or so, and then went back in and sat by the phone again.

When the USFL opened its coffers to Walker, but wouldn't so much as tender Boris a phone call, he steamed. Probably, since he wasn't too good at things like dealing with reality, he didn't quite understand that the term "special case" for the USFL translated into something like, "big, strong, and runs a 4.4 forty."

Bob Boris was offended by the snub. At that point, not only did *he* become suspect, but so did his modus operandi. Boris filed suit against the USFL, asking a legal system that regularly sets free rapists and drug dealers, to set aside the league's rule banning undergraduate players.

Last week, some judge who probably doesn't know a football from a foot locker did the right thing and ruled for Boris. He didn't ask him about his latest hang times, either.

The judge -- a guy by the name of Laughlin Waters -- therefore reserved for himself a place in sports annals, probably right next to the name of Peter Seitz, the guy generally credited with setting aside baseball's reserve clause.

The judge, of course, made the only ruling he could have made. The law is, of course, the law; that being the case, ol' Laughlin could hardly, uh, muddy the waters any further.

Herschel's a General, but Boris just wants to be a private.

But now all the fun starts. Now we get to see just how different the two professional football leagues that operate within the boundaries of this country really are.

The NFL, which hardly has reason to want to go to court for anything these days, so bad is its record, has failed, as of this writing, to respond. It hardly matters. The 28 owners will ante up the bucks and trudge off to appeal the ruling, if it comes to that.

The USFL? Well, Chet Simmons says they'll appeal, too. Of course, his appeal won't look too good after he signs Dupree, which, we all know, he'll ultimately get around to doing.

And Bob Boris? Well, he was signed by the L.A. Express on a Sunday . . . and sent packing on a Tuesday.

Now, I've gotta admit, I'm all for the law and truth and justice and, I guess, the American way, too. I mean, I've seen all three Superman movies.

But, I'm also a person who looks on change suspiciously. Take it slow, I've always said. If you don't believe me, call the poor typesetter who had to try to read this manuscript, typed on a ribbon that's been rewound now six times, I'm so adverse to changing it.

To tell you the truth, folks, the L.A. Express probably gave that Boris kid two more days than I would have.

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Pro Bowl Loss Frustrates Lambert

New England running back Tony Collins runs into some heavy traffic in Mark Haynes (left) and Doug English in the recent Pro Bowl game. The AFC lost -- big.

By the fourth quarter, with the game all but over -- save for a few more minutes of embarrassment -- Jack Lambert, the Steelers' Master of the Middle, decided he'd had enough.

Frustrated by the AFC's dismal performance on the field -- and the fact that the scoreboard read 38-3 in favor of the National Conference -- Lambert, appearing in his ninth consecutive Pro Bowl contest, took a swipe at Chicago Bear great Walter Payton, the NFC's own version of the "Six Million Dollar Man," if contract offers from the Midwest can be believed.

Payton's spent the last two weeks ducking questions concerning his football future. Doubtless, he'll be in Chicago in 1984. That much is certain. But whether he continues to toil for Mike Ditka's Bears, or takes his act to the rival USFL, where he's been offered $2 million-a-year for three years, remains to be seen.

What Payton couldn't duck was Lambert's blow, a semi-punch that set off a somewhat wild climax to a yawner of a game.

"Ah, hell, Walter knows we were frustrated," said Lambert. "I haven't been in a game this bad since Thanksgiving Day," he said, alluding to the Steelers' Turkey Day pounding (45-3) at the hands of the Detroit Lions. "We just weren't ready to play. Maybe they were more prepared because of having lost the Super Bowl or something . . . I don't know."

Lambert did know that, for the sixth consecutive season -- and he's been there for all of them -- the NFC had defeated the AFC. And he didn't like it very much, even if most of his teammates didn't seem to mind too terribly, especially when one considers that an expense-paid Hawaii vacation and playing in front of some of the most breathtaking spectators in the world are all a part of the package. After all, the Steeler fans don't wear string bikinis to the games, not even in September.

"That's the good part about it," says Lambert, who makes a Hawaiian pilgrimage yearly anyway. "Losing's the bad part. I never like to lose."

Lambert didn't exactly have one of his more scintillating performances, but teammate Gary Anderson did manage to register the AFC's only points, booting a 43-yard field goal as time ran out in the first half.

But time, for the AFC stars, had run out long before that.

The NFC broke quite a few records on their way to the most impressive win in the game's history, and Washington Redskin quarterback Joe Theismann, showing no ill effects from the pounding he took a week earlier at the hands of the Los Angeles Raiders in the Super Bowl, tossed three touchdown passes on the way to a 21-for-27 performance.

AFC coach Chuck Knox lauded both NFC quarterbacks -- Theismann and Joe Montana of the 49ers -- for their precision passing in ripping open an AFC secondary that proved totally helpless against the onslaught.

"I think the fact that Theismann and Montana played recently in the post-season was significant," said Knox. "Their timing was really there. Neither of our quarterbacks (Dan Fouts of San Diego and Bill Kenney of Kansas City, subbing for Miami's Dan Marino) had played since the last regular-season game."

Having members of an offensive line who played a major role in protecting Theismann also had a bearing on the outcome, according to the Seattle Seahawk mentor.

"The fact that they had a number of offensive linemen who played on the same team during the season was a factor," he said, referring to center Jeff Bostic, guard Russ Grimm and tackle Joe Jacoby, all of whom labored in front of Theismann in Washington.

On defense, Knox said Detroit's Bill Gay and Doug English and the Dallas duo of Ed "Too Tall" Jones and Randy White proved way too much to overcome.

"It doesn't surprise me that their defensive linemen had the record number of sacks (eight) because they played so well," he said.

Steeler center Mike Webster, making his sixth Pro Bowl appearance, agreed.

"They were doing things up front that you could tell they'd been doing all year," he explained. "In these games, you usually don't get too technical or fancy. You're mostly going one-on-one. But they were looping and stunting because they were familiar with each other's moves.

"I felt pretty bad for our quarterbacks."

The quarterbacks felt pretty badly for themselves, too.

"I felt kind of slow to begin with," said Fouts, who spent much of the season nursing a balky right shoulder. "I haven't worked in a long time; I've spent a lot of time just resting the shoulder.

"But their pass rush was just too much for us. There were times I didn't even get to set up, let alone look downfield."

Bill Walsh, the 49er coach who led the record-setting NFL squad, opined that his job was a rather easy one. It was, he allowed, simply a matter of putting together a great group of players and then letting them perform. And, at the same time, letting them have a little fun.

"I think this could be the greatest group of players ever put together on one team," he crowed, "The quarterbacks, receivers, the linebackers, and defensive linemen are particularly impressive.

"We may have had a little more incentive since the Redskins lost the Super Bowl, but our defensive line got off the ball beautifully, and our timing between both our quarterbacks and the receivers was excellent."

Theismann, whose performance against the Raiders was less than spectacular, connected on scoring tosses of 16 yards to William Andrews of the Falcons, eight yards to Green Bay's James Lofton and six yards to tight end Paul Coffman, also of the Packers, in leading the most lopsided victory of the series.

The NFC's other points came on a two-yard pass from Montana to Andrews, a 44-yard interception return by Nolan Cromwell of the Rams, a 14-yard run by L.A.'s Eric Dickerson, and a 23-yard field goal by New York Giant kicker Ali Haji-Sheikh.

Anderson's three-pointer made him one-for-two in his first Pro Bowl appearance, his miss coming from 33 yards.

"The score was pretty bad, wasn't it?" joked Anderson. "But I had a good time. It was great to meet so many of the players that you've heard about. Plus, I got the chance to discuss kicking with Ali, and that was interesting.

"I'm hoping that my performance in future years allows me to be selected again during my career. Despite the final score, it was a great honor for me, something I'll never forget."

Theismann, however, put the game in its proper perspective.

The Pro Bowl MVP, who finished with 242 passing yards -- yet another record -- explained, "Being selected is the greatest of honors, because you're selected by your peers who know the rigors you go through every day.

"Individual teams around the NFC are fortunate to have some good people on them. But you put a group like this together and football is really fun."

Except to Jack Lambert, who concluded, "Ah, it's over with now. Boy, we got our tails whipped. But, that's how my other season ended, too. Now I'm just gonna go out and relax."

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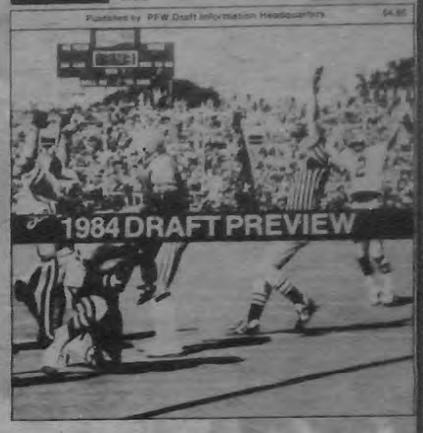

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A Taste Of Ailes

A Comical Look At The Pittsburgh Sports Scene

BY DAVE AILES

In these days of law suits, agents, defections and holdouts, when sports pages are clogged with legalese, wouldn't it be funny if . . .

• The City of Pittsburgh votes to convert Three Rivers Stadium into a silo, agreeing to release the Steelers, Pirates and Maulers from their leases in the interest of improved traffic flow to the northside.

• The Steelers draft Mike Rozier in the first round of the NFL draft, explaining that his contract with the Maulers is nul, not to mention void. In an accompanying suit filed in the Allegheny County Court of Very Common, the Steelers allege that Rozier's signature is actually that of Fats Holmes.

• Rozier is unavailable for comment. He is honoring a commitment in Lima, Peru, site of the annual South America/North America College All-Star Bowl. Rozier, alas, is not in uniform because of a painfully swollen ego.

• When cornered by a gaggle of reporters at his hotel in downtown Lima, Rozier says he's never heard of the Steelers or Maulers. "Contract? What contract? I'm considering a career in pro soccer," says Rozier, "or pro wrestling . . . or . . . "

• ESPN announces plans to telecast a series of rodeos and equestrian events at Three Rivers, stating they "will pay to convert the stadium after a rodeo," says a joint spokesman for the Steelers and Pirates, reading from a prepared announcement.

• The City of Pittsburgh advises the Steelers, Pirates and Maulers to play their home games in the parking lot behind Monroeville Mall, in the interest of improved traffic flow to the northside.

• Monroeville Council floats a $6 trillion bond issue to put a roof over the parking lot.

• The Steelers, Pirates and Maulers sign a joint, 40-year lease to use the parking lot behind Monroeville Mall for all home games.

• The Maulers issue a separate statement saying they've already sold all standing room tickets between the 45-yard lines at the parking lot. That's because the parking lot has no seats.

• Fats Holmes tells reporters he's never heard of Mike Rozier.

• Duquesne basketball coach Jim Satalin announces that all Duquesne home games will be played at Three Rivers instead of the Civic Arena. "We already have season ticket orders for all seats between the 20s," Satalin claims.

• The Mesquite, Texas City Council files suit opposing the relocation of its rodeo franchise to Pittsburgh, saying the move is nothing more than a bunch of bullBLEEP.

• The Steelers draft Cliff Stoudt in the second round. "We want him back," says a team spokesman. "But don't quote me on that."

• Mike Rozier announces, through a Peruvian translator, that he's never heard of Fats Holmes. "My hero is Pele," says Rozier.

• Cliff Stoudt signs a letter of intent to play basketball at Duquesne.

• The Steelers counter by drafting Nellie King in the third round, claiming he's the tallest announcer available.

• The Steelers cut Myron Cope. "Too short," says a team spokesman. "But don't quote me on that."

Rozier will go off to South America to hone his skills as a soccer star.

• The Steelers, Maulers and Pirates announce the installation of a medallion, in the shape of a Terrible Towel, at their new playing field behind Monroeville Mall. The teams will share, equally, in the annual Terrible Towel medallion rental. A buck and a half.

• Chuck Noll emerges from his office during the NFL draft, just long enough to issue the following terse announcements: "We haven't peaked yet" . . . and . . . "Which way to Monroeville?" . . . and . . . "Who's Jim Satalin?"

• The Steelers draft Enrique Romo in the fourth round, then open negotiations with Romo's agents, Pedro Guerrero and Taco Louis.

• The Steelers install a Taco Louis medallion next to the Terrible Towel in the parking lot at Monroeville Mall . . . in the shape of a wild pitch.

• The Steelers draft Marcus Dupree in the fifth round, but Dupree respectfully declines. "I've decided to pursue my life's work," says Dupree, hopping on the back of a refuse truck.

• The Allegheny County Court of Cop A Plea names Pirate captain Bill Madlock as an honorary traffic court judge.

• ABC, NBC and BBC announce the signing of a contract to telecast all Duquesne basketball games played at Three Rivers Stadium. Brent Doubleberger and H. Cosell are the announcers.

• "Who's H. Cosell?," Mike Rozier wants to know, through his translator.

• Steeler president Dan Rooney emerges from his office during the NFL draft and says, "I think we've peaked."

• So has this column.

Steelers Weekly columnist Dave Ailes is sports editor of the Greensburg Tribune-Review. His column is a regular feature.

LEARNING ABOUT THE DIVING REFLEX SHARED BY MAN AND BEAVER IS KEEPING OUR SCIENTISTS VERY BUSY.

How do mammals stay underwater for prolonged periods of time without the lack of oxygen causing brain or heart damage?

American Heart Association-funded research, led by Thomas A. McKean, Ph.D., is uncovering new information on the way a beaver modifies his body's use of oxygen as soon as his nose hits the water. This "diving reflex" means the animal's system automatically routes blood to the vital organs most easily damaged by lack of oxygen — and even slows his heartbeat to reduce its oxygen needs.

This reflex is initiated when the cold water hits certain nerve endings in the beaver's snout.

Amazingly enough, the same is true of the human nose.

Now doctors can treat one kind of abnormally fast heart rhythm by immersing the patient's face in chilly water long enough to trigger the reflex. And a slower, normal rhythm emerges.

Furthermore, knowing that colder water produces a stronger reflex, investigators proved that a chilled body organ demands less oxygen. Which has meant successful changes in open heart surgery procedures.

We support thousands of projects as important as this one. But we need your help. A contribution to the American Heart Association is an investment in research that makes a difference. And even discovers surprises right under your nose.

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From The Sidelines

Washington Trade Still Right

WASHINGTON WASN'T THE ANSWER

Sirs:

Like everyone else, I've agreed and disagreed with the opinions and insights of *PSW's* writers (and editor) in the past. But this time, I can't let you get away with it.

In the January 9, 1984 issue, the editor was on his way to a credible editorial on some obstacles the Steelers (both coaches and players) must overcome to be true Super Bowl contenders. He emphasized the lack of confidence and leadership as some of those obstacles (apparent in the playoff loss to the Raiders).

Then . . . he blew it. He questioned the Steelers' move in trading Anthony Washington to the Redskins for a third- or fourth-round draft choice. Perhaps he should have waited until after the Redskin-49er playoff game and the Super Bowl, and he'd have seen why they did make the trade.

Granted, Washington has a lot of "potential," but, in my opinion, he hasn't yet shown that he's worthy of being a starting cornerback in the NFL. Ask the 49ers' or the Raiders' receivers who continually beat Washington on every conceivable route.

And let's not lose hope so easily. With some luck in avoiding injuries, more confidence in their abilities and some draft finds at cornerback and offensive tackle, the Steelers can pass next year's tough schedule test and finish what they started . . . exciting Super Bowl games.

Sincerely,
B. Cress
Naples, FL

Possibly you read too much into the comments about Washington. We were hardly implying that he was worthy of being a starter anywhere in the NFL right now. What we were saying was that, with no successor to Mel Blount anywhere in the organization, perhaps the Steelers should have practiced the same patience in Washington's case as they've practiced with a few other players whose continued employment by the team was somewhat questionable. For instance, the Steelers keep paying Greg Hawthorne every year, and, outside of a few flashes of brilliance when he's healthy, what's he done to warrant their confidence in him?

Sure, Washington got burnt beyond recognition in the playoffs. But, sooner or later, this team has got to develop a player to replace Blount, and right now we don't think they have one. Washington's "potential" -- which you admit he's got -- is more than the Steelers have right now.

Also, some more digging has indicated to us now that there's no way the Steelers will get much more than a sixth-round pick for Washington.

SUPPORT FOR FRANCO

Dear Sirs:

The season has ended and, as usual, for some Steeler fans, the cries for Franco Harris to retire have begun already. Dave Ailes says (Jan. 30 issue), "Began 1983 like a stallion, finished like a tortoise . . ."

I'll admit that Franco isn't as fast as he once was and that he could use some rest during a game. But not be a starter, come on now! Franco proved once again in 1983 that he is a very valuable back. He led the team in rushing, rushing attempts, and was the third-leading receiver.

I think if you really look at Franco's so-called "sag" at the end of the year, you'll note the following things: First, without a passing game, the opposition defenses wised up and stacked up against the run, limiting what Franco could do. Second, throwing out the game with the Jets, the Steelers were behind in those last six games, and they were forced to throw the ball in an attempt to catch up.

Former Steeler Anthony Washington was burned time and time again by Cliff Branch in the Super Bowl.

In the last five losses, including the playoff game, Harris carried the ball just 49 times. How many yards can you get carrying the ball only 10 times a game? Finally, even though he is still the man the opposition keys on to stop the Steeler running game, Franco is still the type of back who does better carrying the ball more often. In games with 11, five, seven and six carries, he didn't even get a chance to get started. And I still haven't mentioned all the injuries to the offensive line and how that affected the running game as a whole.

I think it's time for the boo-birds to give this great player the kind of credit he deserves, and to remember the "great" John Riggins is even older than Franco and still going strong.

Thank you,
David Risaliti
Ebensburg, PA

Your points are well-taken. At the same time, Steeler officials have noted privately that they probably relied a bit too heavily on Franco in the first part of the '83 season, leaving Franco a little weaker than normal in the second half.

Franco can still contribute to the Steelers in 1984, but, it's our opinion that the team will have to be a little more judicious in how they use Franco.

STOUDT'S ADDRESS

Dear Steelers Weekly:

Unlike most Steeler fans, I've still got an interest in quarterback Cliff Stoudt. I'd like to be able to write to Cliff. Can you give me his address with the Birmingham Stallions, please?

Thank you,
Kim Saylor
Lemont, PA

You can write to Cliff in care of the Birmingham Stallions. Their address is: 1919 Morris Ave., Birmingham, ALA 35203.

FANS ALL OVER

Dear Sir:

I've been a Steeler fan for about five years (I'm only 14 years old). I'm originally from Altoona, PA, and when we moved here to Oklahoma, about three years ago, I thought everyone in the town of Stroud would favor teams like Dallas or Houston.

Well, it turns out that half the population of Stroud loves the Steelers.

I also enjoy the *Steelers Weekly* very much. My friend and I both receive it and we like to compare notes.

I just wanted to let the Steelers know that they have loyal fans halfway across the country.

Thank you,
Mike Wilt
Stroud, OK

Halfway across the country! The Steelers have fans all over the country. Seriously, thanks for letting us know that Stroud, Oklahoma is behind the Black and Gold.

PEARSON A STEELER?

Dear Steelers Weekly:

I have been a Steeler fan for many years, having been born and raised in the Pittsburgh area before moving to Harrisburg.

I'd like to know if Drew Pearson (Dallas Cowboys) ever had a tryout with the Steelers in the early '70s. I think it might have been the last year that Preston Pearson was with the team.

An answer would be most helpful.

Thank you,
Tim Bevan
Harrisburg, PA

Dallas Cowboys' wide receiver Drew Pearson never had a tryout with the Steelers. Pearson was signed as a free agent by the Cowboys in 1973. The Pearson you may be thinking of could be wide receiver Barry Pearson, who played with the Steelers in 1972 and 1973. He was a Gregg Garrity, possession-type receiver who served most of '72 on the taxi squad and caught 23 passes for 317 yards and three touchdowns in '73.

LINE-UPS ARE INCLUDED WEEKLY

Dear Mr. Arkush:

Great! The Best! Marvelous!

I am so happy with my *Steelers Weekly* that I could just pop. Except . . . I can't get it soon enough, and, sometimes it doesn't come at all. Is there any way I can receive my Steeler "Bible" sooner? I am willing to pay first class postage to get it.

One more thing: Is there any way you can print the starting line-ups for the games in the *Weekly?* If a game is not televised, there is no way of knowing who is in there. Also, is it possible to update injuries weekly?

Once again, you folks are doing a helluva job. I just wish I could enjoy it sooner.

Thank you,
Don Wuchter
Galt, CA

Your problem with delivery has been turned over our circulation department, and hopefully better service will result. If not, don't hesitate to call our toll-free number, 800-621-8655. Also, for your information and the information of all of our readers, there is, indeed, first-class postal service available. The cost is $20 yearly in addition to the annual subscription rate.

As for the line-ups, they are printed (depth charts) in our preview section weekly. We assume you'd like them printed in the game stats, too, and, given the way the Steelers accumulated injuries this year, that's a pretty good idea, and one that we'll seriously consider for next year. Injury updates, as we've mentioned in past letters, are a bit harder. We do try to update past injuries weekly when possible, but, if a Steeler is injured in Sunday's game, it's sometimes difficult for us to project the seriousness of that injury by the time we go to press at 4 a.m. Monday morning.

Stellino On The NFL

Raiders A Great Team? They Have To Repeat First

There are three major conclusions to be reached in the aftermath of the way the Los Angeles Raiders butchered the Hogs, cornered the Smurfs, bombed the Pearl Harbor Crew and took the glee out of the Fun Bunch in Super Bowl XVIII:

1. The Redskins may have been the most overrated pro football team since the 1968 Baltimore Colts who were upset by the New York Jets in Super Bowl III.

2. The era of the one-year champion is alive and well.

3. There will be no talk about new trends since the Raiders have been doing the same thing for two decades.

Taking the items in order, it's almost unbelievable that the Raiders went into the game as an underdog. They had lost by only two points to the Redskins in RFK Stadium without Mike Haynes, with Marcus Allen appearing in the game for only one play and with Cliff Branch leaving in the first half with a pulled hamstring muscle suffered while running out a 99-yard touchdown pass play.

The Redskins were well coached by Joe Gibbs -- although he didn't distinguish himself in the Super Bowl -- and he did a fine job of blending in the Redskin role players into a cohesive unit. Never has a coach done so much with so little.

But it was lunacy to compare the Redskins to the Steelers of the 1970s or even the Packers of the 1960s. The Redskin defense had Anthony Washington -- who couldn't play for the Steelers of 1983, much less 1975 -- starting on the corner.

In fact, there probably wasn't a single Redskin defensive player who could have started on the celebrated Steeler Steel Curtain defensive unit.

Great teams have great defenses and the Redskins don't.

The result showed how difficult it is to repeat as a champion in this era. In the first 14 years of Super Bowl play, it was easier to repeat as Super Bowl champion than to win it the first time.

Except for a four-year span between the third and sixth Super Bowls, the back-to-back champion was the rule rather than the exception. Green Bay started the trend by winning the first two, Miami won the seventh and eighth and Pittsburgh won the ninth and 10th and 13th and 14th.

It should be noted, too, that the Packers won five championships in a seven-year span. It wasn't their fault that the Super Bowl wasn't founded until they won their fourth and fifth titles, so they really don't get their due recognition.

But, in this era of parity, it's difficult for a team to stay on top.

The Raiders, though, seem to be a throwback. They have that dominant look of a 1970s team, but coach Tom Flores isn't making any predictions about repeating. He knows the pitfalls. He's now played or coached on four Super Bowl champion teams -- the 1970 Chiefs, the 1976 Raiders, the 1980 Raiders and the 1983 Raiders. The first three teams didn't even make it back to the Super Bowl, much less repeat. In 1981, the Raiders slumped to a 7-9 record after winning the Super Bowl the previous year.

"One of the big problems is that when you win a Super Bowl, it's a very short offseason," Flores said after he joined Vince Lombardi, Don Shula, Chuck Noll and Tom Landry as the only coaches to win more than one Super Bowl.

"By the time you come down off the high the game gives you, it's March and before you know it, it's time for the draft and mini-camp and then you're in training camp.

Tom Flores, who now has played on or coached four Super Bowl champion teams, knows the biggest part of winning the title is doing it again next year.

"The players enjoy all the things that go with it, and they may be ready physically for the new season but may not be ready mentally. I admire Washington for getting back to the Super Bowl and I admire Pittsburgh for winning it twice back-to-back," he said.

Flores said he doesn't enter the season thinking about getting to the Super Bowl. He said the first goal is simply to make the playoffs. "The toughest thing is to qualify. That's the number one goal. You worry about the rest later," he said.

The Raiders, though, have a better shot of repeating than the Redskins did. They've probably got the best shot of repeating since the 1978 Steelers.

In fact, it'd be a treat to see Lester Hayes and Mike Haynes play against Lynn Swann and John Stallworth in their prime. It's unfortunate we'll never see that matchup.

When a team wins the Super Bowl, there's usually a tendency to try to copy what the team on top does. But don't look for clubs to try to copy the Raiders. They have a unique style.

They change players, coaches and towns but they still do things the Raider way. They do it Al Davis' way.

Flores is quick to claim he's not a genius. "Einstein was a genius," he said. "I'm a football coach." But Flores knows the genius slot on the Raider team is already filled. Al Davis holds down that spot.

In this era of the one-back offenses and wide open play, they still play the old-fashioned pro set -- two running backs, one tight end and two wide receivers. They don't send in different guys on different downs. Their 11 guys play offense. Marcus Allen doesn't come out on passing downs. He's one of the best receivers on the team.

They also let the players do their own thing.

Says Flores, "Here's one thing that we do that's maybe different from some teams. We coach our way and they play our way. But we let them be themselves as long as they adhere to our way of doing things. You have to be on time and if you're fined, you're fined. I don't yell and scream at them. I take it out of their check.

"I have 49 guys who are football players. They do everything we ask them to do. Otherwise, they're not around. But they're all individuals and we let them be individuals as long as they don't embarrass or hurt the organization or myself. Why not? I certainly don't want 49 clones. That'd be very boring."

The Raiders also play what Flores calls "attack football." He said, "We attack offensively with a bomb or a threat of a bomb or a breakaway run. Defensively, we attack with man-to-man coverage. That's our style."

It's been their style back to the days when Daryle Lamonica had the "Mad Bomber" label.

The Raiders also like to relish their outlaw image but there's a very human side of the team.

Flores said he'll never forget the moment when he walked past Lyle Alzado on the sidelines. "There was a mean, nasty, vicious Lyle Alzado with tears in his eyes," Flores said.

Flores said he had to turn away or his eyes would have been glistening at the thought of Alzado finally being on a championship team after all these years in the league.

Yes, the Raiders are the championship team.

Now they're going to have to prove whether or not they're a great team. They're going to have to prove whether or not they can repeat.

Wayne Capers, the Steelers' second-round pick, caught this pass against the Raiders in the playoffs, but missed much of the year with injuries.

Rating The Rookies . . .

Jury Is Still Out On Steelers' '83 Rookie Crop

For lo these many years now, it has been a generally accepted rule of norm, especially among the knowledgeable of the National Football League, that it takes at least three years to fully evaluate the impact of a single draft.

Anything less, we've been told, can be little more than the callow, hasty rankings of amateurs. For, before their third NFL anniversary, draft picks and free agents -- especially free agents -- are viewed in the same light as pubescent teens . . . that is, still wet behind the ears.

However, with the dawn of the United States Football League, and the resultant drain on the talent pool -- forget those figures that show that 143 of the top 150 players in the country signed with the NFL last year, the talent available has indeed been drained -- more and more teams are relying on the instant-starter rookie. At the very least, rookies are being expected to contribute significantly . . . and quickly.

The days of stockpiling talent and nurturing potential are, at least for now, probably gone. Maybe forever. Perhaps just until the USFL has its little fling and then disappears to wherever it is that defunct leagues disappear to.

Until that day comes -- mercifully -- however, NFL rookies will, for the most part, cease to be rookies very quickly. And, with that in mind, *Steelers Weekly* sought to rate this year's rookie crop, from the highest of the draft picks to the lowest of the free agents.

Having discussed the nine rookies that finished the season on the Steeler roster with various personnel people from around the league, *Pro Football Weekly* college and pro personnel expert Joel Buchsbaum, and the rookies themselves, we present our first annual rookie retrospective:

THE DRAFT PICKS

Wayne Capers, wide receiver, No. 2 draft pick -- Not exactly a total victim of the famed Steeler number two draft pick jinx, but certainly a guy who spent the year trying to dodge it.

His troubles began early in training camp when he suffered a neck injury that slowed the learning process. Then, just as he was beginning to come on strong, he injured a foot making a touchdown catch against Tampa Bay.

His sparkling 48-yard reception over Lester Hayes in the playoff loss to the Raiders showed the kind of talent he has. But right now, that talent is all raw potential. Must become a more polished receiver, and stay away from injuries.

Finished the regular season with 10 catches, an 18.5-yard average and one touchdown.

"I learned a lot and I've got a lot more to learn," he said. "John Stallworth was a big help to me, and I hope to get a full training camp of watching him work. You can learn a lot just by doing that."

Buchsbaum says, "Plenty of talent, but came along slowly. Like a lot of rookies, had trouble adjusting to the complicated pro style passing attack, but the physical tools are certainly there. If he stays healthy, he could be the big-play receiver the Steelers need. Good speed, but not breakaway-type speed. People compared him to Stallworth, and he looks like him physically. Now all he's got to do is play like a young Stallworth."

Paul Skansi, wide receiver/punt returner, No. 5A draft pick -- Was the team's primary punt return man most of the year, and also saw some time as a third wide receiver in passing situations.

His lack of speed didn't help him, nor did his lack of strength. Teams consistently tried to jam the young Steeler receivers at the line, and, until he learns to work his way into the secondary, that will continue to be a problem for Skansi.

As a punt returner, he was steady towards the second part of the season. But early on, he was especially shaky, fumbling five kicks but only losing one. His one brief fling came against Tampa Bay, when his 57-yard return sparked the Steelers' fourth-quarter comeback.

"It took awhile for me to get comfortable back there on punts," he confessed. "Plus, I was always trying to keep my mind on what was happening offensively. What I found out is that I've got alot to learn about the passing game. Catching the ball is almost the least of things. In the pros, you're working with a lot of situations and there are times you've got to know when to break off the pattern or know what your options are. That takes awhile to learn."

Says Buchsbaum, "His speed doesn't help him and he gets hurt also by his lack of size. Has the reputation for having great hands, but you've got to get into the pattern first. His future could depend on how the Steelers draft."

Gregg Garrity, wide receiver, No. 5B draft pick -- Same type of receiver as Skansi, but, for some reason -- probably more playing time -- developed more rapidly. Started a couple of games, but was mostly used as a third-down, possession-type receiver. Finished the season with 19 catches for 14.7-yard average and one touchdown. Might be remembered as the player who caught Terry Bradshaw's first touchdown pass of the year, in the 15th game of the season.

If he continues to improve, he'll be tough to cut, because, despite his lack of size or speed, he keeps coming up with clutch catches, and that's been the story of his entire career. A guy who keeps beating the odds.

Buchsbaum says, "Came on better than Skansi. Still, he probably shouldn't have been taken in the fifth round. He still would have been there a round or two later, but the fact that the Steelers needed receivers certainly helped him."

Henry Odom, running back/-kickoff returner, No. 8A draft pick -- Only carried the ball twice from scrimmage for seven yards total. For some reason, the Steelers saw him as a kick returner, but he was fairly dismal there, averaging just 19.4 yards on 39 returns. Still, that was the best mark on the team.

Showed some speed in the exhibitions, and ran hard, but it's tough to imagine him making the roster next year unless he shows incredible amount of development.

"I was disappointed I didn't do a better job returning kicks," he said. "But, I got the opportunity to play on the special teams and the coaches here have told me that that's the way to get noticed. I hope to get playing time in the exhibitions next year and show what I can do."

Says Buchsbaum, "If the Steelers draft any kind of running backs, Odom's chances of making the team will be slim. One thing is certain -- he's not the answer to their kickoff return problems."

Craig Dunaway, tight end, No. 8B draft pick -- Made the most of his second chance. Cut by the Steelers in training camp, but got another chance because of injuries. A hard worker who didn't catch a pass during the season but who impressed coaches with his willingness to learn and his blocking ability, used primarily as the third tight end in short-yardage situations.

Has very average speed, and could use more definition of strength, but he's the type of player you like to have around. His future could depend on how soon the Steelers plan to develop a backup to Bennie Cunningham. John Rodgers hasn't done much in two years, so a strong showing from Dunaway could get him on the roster.

"Getting the second chance was important for me, because it meant I got a year to learn just how tough the league could be," he said.

Blake Wingle, guard, No. 9 draft pick -- He's got the kind of look that the Steelers like -- the short, beefy lineman. Didn't get a lot of playing time, although he did see some action when injuries depleted the offensive line and also played some as a third tight end in short-yardage downs. An avowed weight-lifter and a hard worker. The coaches saw enough in him to keep him around and they think he can be a player.

"Technique work and building up my strength -- those are the things I plan to concentrate on during the offseason," he said. "Also, I'm planning to work more on the mental part of the game, too. You've got to be prepared to play in this league."

Says Buchsbaum, "Not very quick, and doesn't have the best feet around, but he fits the mold of Steeler linemen. Good strength, but needs to get more experience."

THE FREE AGENTS

Harvey Clayton, cornerback/-nickel back -- One of the most pleasant surprises on the team. Clayton played most of the season as the nickel back and was particularly adept at the blitz, where he could use his blazing speed to beat blockers on the outside rush.

Had 14 tackles and four assists, two sacks and one interception, a big play against the Cincinnati Bengals, returning a theft 70 yards for the game-clinching touchdown.

Gave the Steelers a new dimension in the secondary because he could stay with the tight ends and backs. Only drawback is his lack of size. One has to wonder about his run support, although he never minded sticking his nose into the action in '83. Could be groomed as eventual replacement for Mel Blount.

"A total learning experience, that's what the season was," he said. "I enjoyed the challenge, and I got a lot of experience playing as the extra man on passing downs. That's gonna help me when I come back next year to fight for a spot.

"I found out that there are some great receivers in this league, but I also found out that I can play here."

Says Buchsbaum, "A solid free agent pick. Steelers got a guy no one else was interested in and he contributed for them. His size makes him a question mark, but he's got great speed."

Greg Best, safety -- Like Craig Dunaway, he got a second chance and proved that he had a place in the NFL. Re-signed after foot injury to Eric Williams. A terror on the special teams, making 14 tackles and getting five assists. Also scored his first professional touchdown when he scooped up a fumble late in the first Cleveland game and raced 94 yards for a score.

"It meant so much for me to get a chance to play for my hometown team, I can't tell you," he said. "The veterans in the secondary are a great group of guys and they helped me a lot. I know what I've got to do, and that's prove to the coaches that I can contribute on the special teams while I learn the safety position. I've been around long enough to remember that that's how players like Donnie Shell got their start."

Tim Harris, running back/-kickoff returner -- Certainly plays better than he looks, so you can imagine what he looks like. Hardly the prototype running back. Kind of bowling-ball shaped, but he's got surprising speed.

Carried just twice from scrimmage for 15 yards, and returned 18 kickoffs for a 16.1-yard average. Kind of in the same position as Henry Odom, in that the Steelers could be drafting running backs looking for depth.

Had a fair exhibition season, but didn't get much chance in the regular season.

Could be a victim of the draft in '84.

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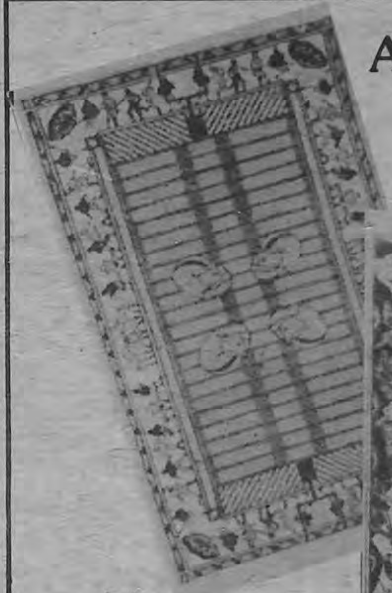

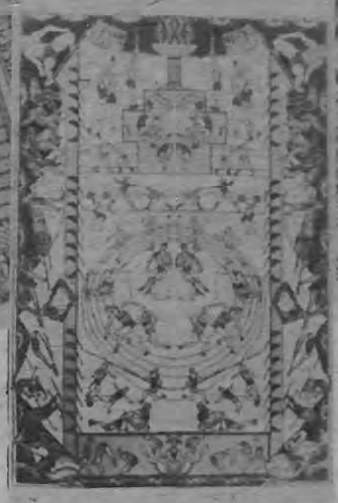

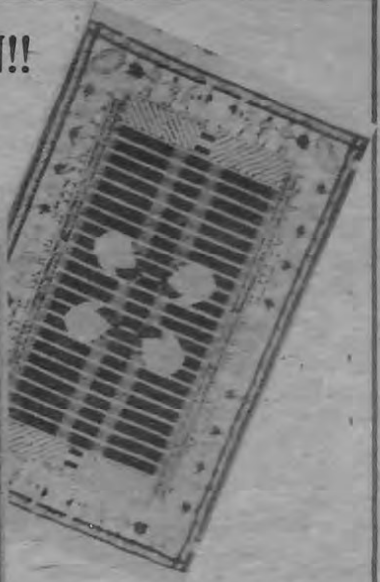

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BLITZ

The Steelers, upset because the Maulers of the rival USFL have obtained a lease to play in Three Rivers Stadium, last week asked Allegheny County Common Pleas Court to rescind the Steelers' lease at the field.

The Steelers' 40-year lease, signed in 1966, has what is known as an "exclusivity clause," which guarantees the team will be the only professional football club allowed to use the facility.

Steeler president Dan Rooney said the lease was violated when the Pittsburgh Stadium Authority agreed to sign a four-year lease with the Maulers.

Rooney said the length of the Maulers' lease was not the only thing about the agreement with the USFL franchise that upset him, but he would not elaborate.

When the Maulers' lease was announced late last year, city officials said similar exclusivity agreements have been overruled by the courts and they had no choice but to allow the Maulers to play at Three Rivers.

Rooney, however, said, "We feel our lease is unique. We feel it is more of a financial statement. I don't see how you can go down the line after a period of time and say that exclusivity doesn't hold."

Rooney said the complaint was not intended to force the Maulers out of the stadium, but was an attempt to either uphold the exclusivity clause or renegotiate the lease if the clause is ruled invalid.

"We're saying our lease is an exclusive lease and that's the reason for the 40 years (on the lease)," he said. "If they can't give us an exclusive lease, fine. Then we're here and the Maulers are here."

If the lease is rescinded, the Steelers would try to negotiate a more favorable agreement with the city, Rooney said. Asked if that meant a deal better than the one the Maulers have, Rooney would not comment directly, only saying, "We would negotiate strongly, I can assure you that."

Rooney said team and city officials tried to settle the disagreement outside of court but were unable to do so.

If the Steelers' lease is rescinded, the team will not look for another stadium, Rooney said.

"We don't have any intention of leaving. We think Three Rivers Stadium is a fine stadium," he said.

"The Steelers have played football in Pittsburgh for 51 seasons and our commitment to this community and our loyal fans will continue. We are Pittsburghers," Rooney said.

* * *

There has been rumors that the Steelers are interested in acquiring Seattle quarterback Jim Zorn, who's been relegated to second-string status with the emergence of young Dave Krieg.

Zorn, it is said, would offer the Steelers some insurance in the event that Terry Bradshaw's right elbow doesn't come around, and would give them an experienced hand at the controls, as opposed to Mark Malone, who's had but two starts in his four-year career.

Although Seattle general manager Mike McCormick has denied rumors that Zorn was being shopped around the league, those denials will cease if the Seahawks reach agreement with Warren Moon, the CFL quarterback who has apparently narrowed his choices in the NFL to Seattle or Houston.

McCormick, however, continues to call the rumors "assinine."

"We have not tried to trade Jim Zorn at all, flat, period, unequivocally denied. His name has not been mentioned to any football team," said an angry McCormick when questioned about Zorn's future with the Seahawks.

For the record, Zorn, one of the few remaining original Seahawks, completed his eighth year in the league in 1983. He is 30 years of age, and would be 31 by the start of the 1984 training camp.

Zorn has admitted publicly that he figures he'll be with another team in 1984. "I don't see where I've got a big future here," he said.

Reportedly, the Steeler interest is being

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countered by interest from the Houston Oilers, who would certainly be in the market for a player of Zorn's capabilities, if they fail to sign Moon.

* * *

Quarterback Terry Bradshaw, who recently spent some time in New York visiting with buddy Tom Seaver -- they both do promotional work for Spalding sporting goods -- told Big Apple reporters that he was so serious about returning to the Steelers in 1984 that he's taught himself to eat and play ping-pong left-handed so as to spare his right arm any undue movement.

"I'm going to be back," said Terry. "I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure I don't do any damage to the arm. I don't intend to even think about picking up a football until some time in March. Then I'll just see how thing go."

Biggest regret for Bradshaw on his trip to New York was that he was forced to cancel a showdown exhibition tennis match with Seaver.

* * *

The search for a successor to Woody Widenhofer as defensive coordinator goes on, and most people are surprised that Chuck Noll has yet to name an aide. Reports out of Mobile, Ala. indicated that Noll was talking as if he might be inclined to turn the defense over to Tony Dungy, but that's doubtful given Dungy's tender years.

Also, there was some talk from New Orleans, where most of the league's coaches had gathered for the NFL's three-day evaluation session of college seniors, that Noll was finding it somewhat difficult to land a good man because, as some people put it, "he's hardly one of the boys, and he doesn't have access to some of the names that other people have access to."

The reference was to the fact that there are still some coaches in the league who don't exactly view Noll as part of the fraternity, sharing that he's sometimes aloof.

One thing that's clear is that former Oiler head coach Ed Biles, mentioned in this space last issue as a candidate, probably dropped out of the running a few weeks back. Biles has been named as the color man on Houston Gambler (USFL) broadcasts, and now seems determined not to pursue a coaching position. Not that Biles would have gotten the Steeler job anyway, given Noll's preference for low-key teaching styles.

* * *

February 1 was the day that unsigned NFL players became free agents and the Steelers listed only two free agents. They were quarterback Cliff Stoudt, who began practicing with the Birmingham Stallions on February 2, and defensive back Ernest French, whose football career is probably over, the result of a broken leg suffered during the 1982 season.

* * *

Franco Harris was scheduled to appear on the Phil Donahue Show on Monday, February 6 -- three days after we went to press -- along with Chicago Bear star Walter Payton and all-time NFL rushing leader Jimmy Brown.

Donahue show staffers confirmed that Franco had rejected several invitations to appear, but was finally convinced to come on. It's doubtful, however, what purpose could be served by Franco's appearance.

Steelers Weekly will staff the show with a reporter and photographer and will report on the Franco-Brown matchup in our next issue.

* * *

Steelers reportedly had the largest contingent of any of the NFL teams at the recent three-day college senior evaluation in New Orleans.

Among those attending for the Steelers were the entire coaching staff, the scouting staff, team doctors, trainers and even film man Bob McCartney.

* * *

Linebacker Bob Kohrs is vacationing in Arizona before returning to Pittsburgh to continue rehab work on his knee. Ditto John Goodman who's off to Oklahoma for a few weeks.

In fact, the Steeler offices are very quiet right now, what with the coaches having some time off, very few players back in town yet from vacations, and the scouting staff in New Orleans.

Most of the Steeler people stayed over in New Orleans after the completion of the evaluation sessions because Blesto then held their annual ratings meeting there.

* * *

Dan Rooney recently noted that the Steelers were in need of some offensive linemen, and, if that feeling begins to pervade the Steeler offices, this year could mark a first under Chuck Noll --selection of an offensive lineman in the first round.

* * *

Sources close to the Green Bay Packers indicate that head coach Forrest Gregg was none too happy when Mike Webster turned down his invitation to join the Packer staff. Apparently, since Webster approached Gregg about the job, Gregg believed Webster would accept, if offered the position.

However, after Webster agreed to the job, according to the source, he slept on his decision for a night and changed his mind.

There is also some feeling that, if Webster was serious about pursuing a coaching career, the Steelers may well have assured him that, in 1986, when his contract expires, they'll make sure they find a place for him on their staff.

* * *

So you think the Steelers are pretty well set on the defensive line for years to come? Well, some football people who attended the Senior Bowl say that Steeler coaches watched the defensive linemen that played in the game closer than any other position.

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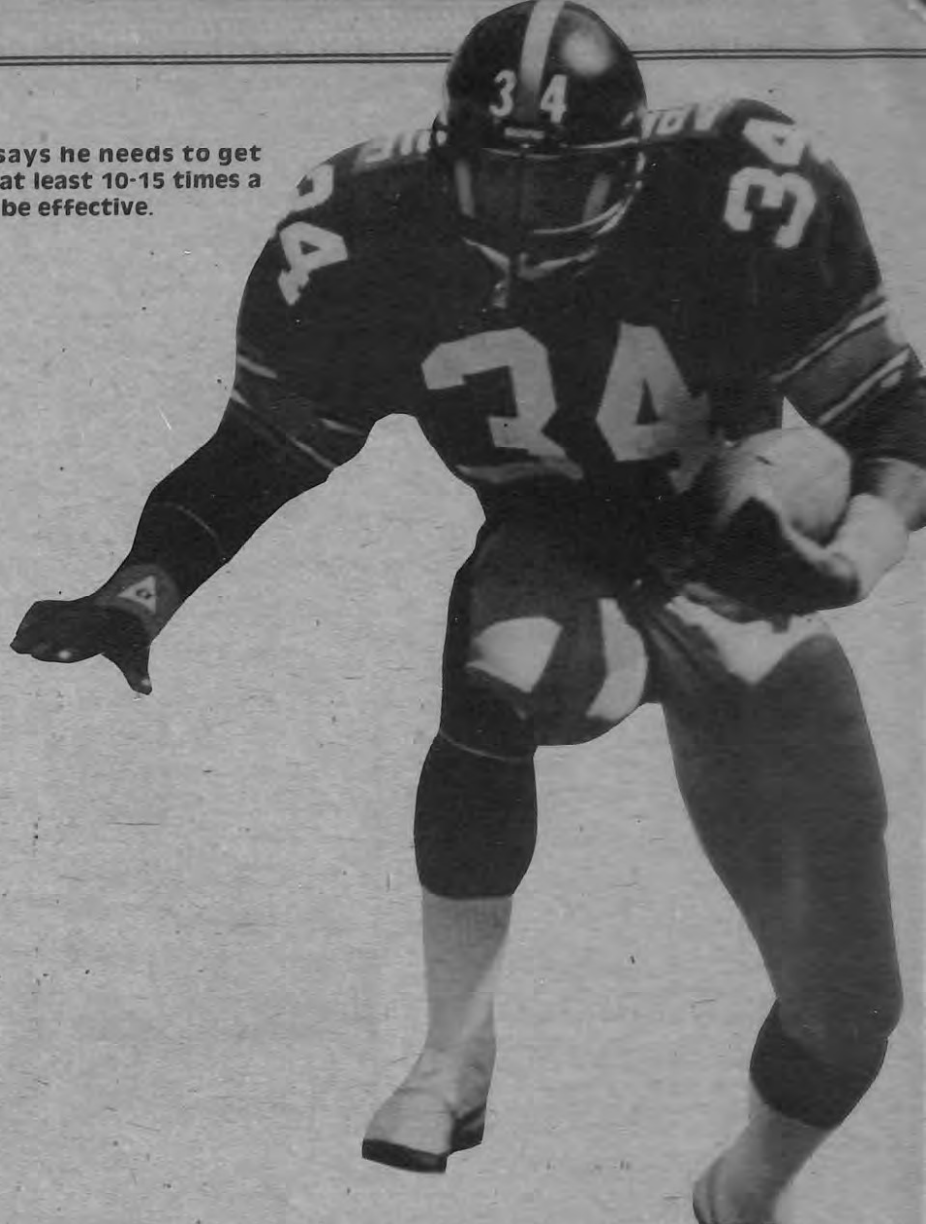

Walter says he needs to get the ball at least 10-15 times a game to be effective.

Abercrombie: Bigger Role Is His Goal For '84 Season

BY LEN PASQUARELLI

He was supposed to be the savior of the Pittsburgh Steeler offense when he arrived on the scene two seasons ago, the catalyst of change that would, in no small way, transform the Black and Gold from a fullback-oriented attack into one designed more around his own particular skills as a potential game-breaker.

Two years later, Walter Abercrombie is still very much the promising game-breaker. But, for the Steelers' 1982 first-round draft pick, and the first running back afforded top-round status since Franco Harris in 1972, the blush, as they say, has been removed from the rose.

His rookie season was a series of misadventures, a tough learning experience. He had to, in order, learn to cope with: his first-ever debilitating injury, a knee sprain suffered on a sweep against the New York Giants in the preseason's second contest; a players' strike that robbed him of precious learning time, not to mention the rehabilitative day-to-day treatments he would have gotten in Pittsburgh; and, finally, and perhaps most importantly, the exaspirating lesson of acclimating one's self to the nuances and complexities of a National Football League offense, and, in the case of the Steelers, an offense that was undergoing great change.

The flashes of brilliance, the manifestation of a talent so immense to even quarterback Terry Bradshaw, who's seen a back or two come down the pike, was forced to admit that his mere presence alone would make everyone else better.

Save for a dazzling, spin-out-of-a-tackle-and-head-for-the-sideline run of 34 yards against the Cleveland Browns, most of Abercrombie's maiden season was spent getting in and out of the whirlpool and listening to head coach Chuck Noll try to reconcile with the writers as to why he wasn't playing Walter more.

There were no strikes in 1983, there were quite a few nagging-type injuries, but, far too often, there was also very little evidence of the raw potential that everyone swore Abercrombie had.

Awarded the starting halfback job in training camp, where, for the second successive summer, he was scintillating enough to turn even some veteran heads at St. Vincent's, Walter Abercrombie concluded the season with 446 rushing yards and a 4.0-yard average, hardly the kind of numbers Steeler fans were expecting. However, Steeler coaches, particularly backfield coach Dick Hoak, saw significant progress, both in Abercrombie's physical skills and also his grasp of the Steeler offense.

Contacted at his Waco home, where he's attending Baylor in pursuit of his degree in Education -- he will be eight hours short by the end of the current term -- Walter Abercrombie, candidly and tactfully admitted that, while he made good progress, he's expecting even greater things from himself in 1984. He also admitted, however, that he hoped to see some changes in the Steeler offensive scheme.

"I don't think anyone can deny that we've got an offense that's built around the fullback for a lot of years now," Walter began, "and that type of offense probably doesn't give me as many chances as I think I need.

"If you're asking me if I think our offense is best-suited for me, then I guess I'd have to say no, it really isn't. It's just not a tailback oriented offense, but that's understandable, because, for all these years, the Steelers have been going with Franco as the main back. It was the offense that was best for what we were doing in past years, but I'm not so sure it's the best for what we're going to have to do now."

An avowed fan of Harris' when he came into the league, Abercrombie made some remarks at season's end which would lead one to believe that he no longer believes Franco should -- or possibly can -- carry the lion's share of the running load in 1984. Although he tempers his approach to the subject now, the message remains the same: Walter Abercrombie wants to get the ball more in '84.

"Franco's still going to be a productive back for us, I don't have any doubts about that, and that's not what I was trying to say when I said what I did," he explains. "But, there comes a time for change and I think maybe that time is now. I think the coaches have got to have the faith in myself and in Frank (Pollard) to give us our share, too.

"We're young and strong and I think we can take the beating. I think Franco got a little worn down towards the end of the season last year. They've got to make better and more careful use of him, that's all I was trying to say."

Abercrombie remains as close to Franco as ever. There are certain realities, however, that he felt needed to be mentioned in light of the Steelers'

disappointing finish. Abercrombie's the last guy who'd suggest dumping #32 onto football's scrap heap. But he readily allows, "The old thing about experience over youth has its place, but not all the time. There are certainly some circumstances that dictate going with the younger player. I think we're getting into that circumstance right now."

He is, he says, ready to take on the so-called pressures of being the team's feature back, feeling he's matured enough to handle that situation, although he doesn't exactly agree there's any pressure involved. Nor does he feel any pressure to fill the role as the offense's big-play performer, even though the Steeler offense in 1983 lacked just that.

"First off, no one's ever said I was here to be the big-play guy. I feel I've got those kind of capabilities," he admits, "but for me to have to be the player that keeps coming up with the big plays, well, our offense just isn't designed that way at all.

"We're supposed to spread the offense around, get the ball to the people who are in the advantageous areas. That's what offense is all about."

The fact remains, though, that Abercrombie had the Steelers' longest run from scrimmage, a 50-yard blast for a touchdown against the Oilers in the Astrodome, and also the second-longest pass reception. It's his receiving skills which have progressed the furthest, he feels. And he's proud of that fact.

"I was never a good receiver in college, never," he points out. "It was a running conference, of course. No one really threw the ball too much. But I think I proved last year that I could catch the football pretty well. That excited me. It's something I worked on during the offseason. In fact, it's probably the thing I worked on the hardest, to tell you the truth.

"I proved to myself that, if I really worked on something really hard, if I really put my mind to it, I could succeed at it. I had faith that I'd become a pretty good receiver, but, looking back, looking at the films it was fun to see me out there catching balls I never thought I'd catch before.

"Maybe that, more than anything else, was the most satisfying part of the season for me."

What wasn't exactly satisfying was the way Abercrombie would often times just miss breaking off a long run because a hand would trip him up or because a hole would close just a hair too quickly.

It was, Walter says, frustrating.

"That's an important point," he was quick to concur when the matter was mentioned. "There were several times I thought I was just a step away from getting into the secondary, just a split-second behind breaking off a long run.

"I think that goes hand-in-hand with what I said earlier about getting the ball more. You're not going to get a long run when you're only getting the ball maybe five times a game. Look at all the great backs and you won't see any of them getting big yardage on just five carries.

"I need to get the ball 10 or so times a game more than I got it last year. If I carry the ball 10-15 times a game, then I think I can get better as the game goes along. But there were games where I'd carry the ball five times, just start to get really warmed up, and then I'd go out. Who knows what would have happened if I'd gotten the ball more. Some of those times when I almost broke big gains might have turned into long gains if I had just gotten my hands on the ball more often.

"The best backs in the league seem to get better the more carries they get. I'm not putting myself in a group with guys like (Walter) Payton or (Tony) Dorsett or anyone like that, but, at the same time, they were young players once, too, and they got the ball. Their teams knew that they needed the ball to be effective. So do I."

Getting the ball more often in '83, however, might have meant absorbing plenty of lumps as the Steeler offensive line suffered through a series of injuries that had line coach Ron Blackledge spending many sleepless nights. Abercrombie figures things have got to be better in '84.

"I agree with Mr. Rooney who said that we've got to have our people healthy for an entire season. We have the linemen who can move people out, but they can't do it from the bench. Injuries are a part of the game, and I hope we got our share out of our system in 1983. A healthy offensive line would mean a great deal to us, that's for sure."

So would a healthy Terry Bradshaw. Abercrombie has yet to get to play a full season with the man who predicted during Walter's rookie training camp, "He'll catch 60 passes in this offense, just by accident."

everyone that they could play last year, until they got tired at the end of the season."

And the offense Walter?

There is a too-long pause, before Walter says, "I think we'll be competitive. We've got some things we've got to take care of. Obviously, it will make some difference who plays quarterback for us. But, no matter, I think we've got some changes that have to be made.

"Still, a lot of good, young people got to play last season and that'll serve us well down the road. There were players who got experience as a rookie who'll help us this coming year. In fact, I wished I'd had a first year like some of our people had, in terms of getting playing time.

"Some people might view that as a setback, the fact that we had to play a lot of different combinations, like with our situation on the offensive line. I don't see it that way at all."

No one's given Abercrombie any specifics for '84, but there will probably be, he says, one very

Abercrombie remains as close to Franco as ever, but feels Steelers will have to use Harris more judiciously in 1984.

Walter doesn't know if Terry's prediction will ever come true, but he wouldn't mind finding out.

"It'd be a big lift if he comes back," Abercrombie says. "I haven't heard much down here about him, so what are they saying?"

When informed that Bradshaw's doctor recently reiterated that Terry should be fit as a fiddle if he just gives his arm the prescribed amount of rest, Abercrombie's voice seemed to rise half an octave.

"That even makes me more enthusiastic about next season," he says. "I'm really looking forward to it already, really excited about it.

"I think the fact that we've been stopped for two years now in the first round of the playoffs is going to make us all a little hungrier. The young players we've got here are really primed to do something big.

"I think our defense, with the people we've got, will be awesome in 1984. They showed

noticeable change in him. He's dropped nearly 15 pounds since the end of the season, weighing in now at about 195.

The weight loss, he contends, wasn't intentional, but now that it's happened, he says he feels much better.

"I like the feeling right now," he confesses, noting that he's still waiting to see how the coaches feel about the new slimmed-down version of Abercrombie. "I feel like a scatback now, I really do. I didn't try to do this. I guess my eating habits have just changed since the end of the season. Now that I'm at this weight, I think I'd like to stay here rather than try to get back up to 210, which is what I played at last season."

Walter Abercrombie isn't looking for any more pounds in 1984, just a bigger piece of the Steeler offense.

"The time has come," he concludes, "for the torch to be passed."

BY TIM SASSONE

In his own way, Gary Dunn again proved he's one of the best at nose tackle.

Defense Had More Ups Than Downs

It's hard to imagine where the Steelers would have been in 1983 without the outstanding performance turned in by their defense. Probably not 10-6, AFC Central Division champions and in the playoffs. Sure, there were breakdowns -- like the 45-3 loss to Detroit, the 30-17 setback in Cleveland on the last weekend of the regular season, and the 38-10 playoff drubbing by the eventual Super Bowl champion Raiders -- but more times than not, the Pittsburgh defense came through with flying colors. Examples:

•Oct. 2 vs. Houston: With the offense gaining just 225 total yards, the Steeler defense comes to the rescue. Donnie Shell, Rick Woods and Mel Blount all have interceptions off Oiler quarterback Gifford Nielsen (13-of-28), while Earl Campbell is held to just 69 yards as the Steelers win 17-10.

•Oct. 10 vs. Cincinnati: A Monday night national television audience watches the Pittsburgh defense score three touchdowns and set up a field goal with its fierce pass rush in a 24-14 win over the Bengals. A fumble recovery for a score by Woods and interception returns for TDs by Ron Johnson and Harvey Clayton save the day -- or night -- for the Steelers, who set a team record with nine sacks.

•Oct. 16 vs. Cleveland: The Steelers intercept six Brian Sipe passes en route to a 44-17 victory. Sipe's first three passes were picked off, two by Mike Merriweather, one he returned for a touchdown, the other setting up a field goal that helped Pittsburgh to a 17-0 lead after six minutes. Later, Greg Best scampered 94 yards for a TD with a Cleveland fumble.

•Oct. 30 vs. Tampa Bay: The Steelers won 17-12, holding the Bucs to just 13 first downs and 236 total yards. Defensive end Keith Willis sets a new team record with two sacks, giving him 12 for the season.

•Nov. 6 vs. San Diego: The Chargers were without quarterback Dan Fouts, but it might not have made any difference the way the Pittsburgh defense played. The Steelers stretched their streak to eight quarters without allowing a touchdown, limiting San Diego to 11 first downs and 59 yards rushing. The Steelers got interceptions by Merriweather and Woods, fumble recoveries by Blount and Keith Gary and sacks from Gary Dunn and Willis. "That's the best defense in the whole NFL," Charger coach Don Coryell said afterwards.

While the Steeler defense might not, as Coryell raved, have been the best in the NFL, it was darn close. Pittsburgh ranked third in total yards per game behind Cincinnati and New Orleans, seventh against the rush, fifth against the pass, first in percentage of interceptions, second in first downs allowed per game, third in sack percentage, fourth in average gain per defensive play and fifth in third down efficiency.

Some experts say the Steelers played over their heads in '83, but it would be hard to argue with numbers like those. There are, however, some question marks, like in the secondary where Blount and Shell are getting on in years, and on the defensive line, where there seemed to be a letdown late in the season, particularly after the tragic loss of Gabe Rivera. And now with long-time defensive coordinator Woody Widenhofer off to coach Oklahoma of the USFL, there are some even more important questions being raised regarding the direction of the defense.

For now, it's time to evaluate the Steeler defense, position-by-position, in an attempt to figure out where it is headed as we approach draft time.

LINE

There isn't all that much concern here, although Rivera's tragic loss has cut into the Steelers' depth at this position. Most observers felt Rivera, Pittsburgh's top draft choice out of Texas Tech last spring, had a promising career ahead of him and that he would have been a key -- possibly dominating -- figure on the defensive line for years to come.

Still, there is an abundance of quality talent on the line in ends Keith Willis, Keith Gary, Tom Beasley and John Goodman, and tackles Gary Dunn and Edmund Nelson.

Willis and Gary are the real up-and-comers. Their development into premier pass rushers was a real bright spot for the defense. Used primarily in passing situations, Willis and Gary combined for 21½ sacks, finishing one-two on the team in that department.

Willis led the way with a club-record 14 sacks. While both players excelled in rushing the quarterback, they're still a little weak against the run. If Willis and Gary can beef up that aspect of their game -- and word has it they'll be working all summer in that direction -- then they probably will replace Beasley and Goodman, who had so-so seasons, full time. Beasley, however, might be tough to replace because of his solid work inside against the run.

Dunn doesn't get the publicity a lot of other nose tackles around the league do, but he's one of the best and quietly proved it again in 1983 despite missing most of the first four games with a knee injury suffered in the season opener against Denver. Dunn, whom teammate Jack Lambert feels should be All-Pro, was third on the team in sacks (behind Willis and Gary) with six, and ninth in tackles with 52. Dunn is strong, quick and smart. He's a major asset to the defense, whether he's recognized as one or not. Edmund Nelson once again did a good job as Dunn's backup and probably will fill a similar role in '84.

It might not be a bad idea for the Steelers to get some added insurance on the defensive front by drafting perhaps a tackle in the middle rounds to help fill the void left by Rivera's career-ending injury. A draft choice who could help out right away, plus the further development of Willis and Gary to go along with Dunn and the others could make this an even stronger unit next fall. One thing the defensive line has going for it is its youth. In 1984, Willis will be 25, Gary 25, Goodman 26, Nelson 24, Beasley 30 and Dunn 31. **Grade: B.**

LINEBACKERS

A real strength in '83, this area will continue to stay that way as long as Jack Lambert is around. Lambert may be 32 years old now, but he's still one of the very best in the game, if not *the* best. His intensity and desire can't be matched. Lambert, who has successfully made the transition from middle to right inside linebacker, had 159 tackles (91 solos) to lead the team for the 10th consecutive year. He also went to the Pro Bowl for the ninth straight time, eclipsing Jack Ham's, and his, old club mark of eight. Lambert was also among Steeler leaders in sacks (four), interceptions (two) and fumble recoveries (two).

Joining Lambert inside in '83 was veteran Loren Toews, who had another strong season. Toews finished fourth in tackles behind only Lambert, Merriweather and Shell, but he may not be back next year. Toews will be 34 in November and is seriously considering retiring after 11 seasons as a Steeler.

Should Toews retire, or even if he doesn't, a likely change in the Steeler defense will find Robin Cole switching from outside right linebacker to join Lambert inside. That was definitely a plan of Widenhofer's before he departed, but whether the new defensive coordinator shares that idea is another story. Cole can probably make the change with little trouble. He was fifth in tackles in '83 with 76 and had five sacks. Moving Cole inside would pave the way for three-year pro Bryan Hinkle to move into a starting position on the outside right. Hinkle, who had 25 solo tackles and an interception for a TD in '83, is a big hitter with speed who deserves the chance to play regularly. There's every indication he can do the job, and do it well.

Speaking of doing a job well, that describes Merriweather's performance in his first season as a full-time starter. The second-year pro from Pacific had some big shoes to fill on the outside left in place of future Hall-of-Famer Jack Ham, one of the all-time Steeler greats. Merriweather filled those shoes all right, drawing rave reviews from the coaches. Chuck Noll even went so far as to say Merriweather had the best physical tools of any outside linebacker he'd seen.

All Merriweather did was finish second to Lambert in tackles with 93, and intercept three passes, one of which he returned for a touchdown. Merriweather has speed, quickness and the big-play ability coaches dream about.

With Lambert inside and Merriweather outside, the Steelers are set on the left side.

If Toews does return, he'll probably head a group of reserve linebackers which includes David Little, Craig Bingham and Bob Kohrs, who should be 100 percent recovered after undergoing knee surgery. Both Little and Bingham have the potential to be key figures in the Steeler picture down the line. So does Todd Seabaugh, who spent all of his rookie season on injured

reserve with a bad back. The Steelers still have high hopes for their third-round draft choice in '83. **Grade: B.**

SECONDARY

This was a hot and cold area for the Steelers in 1983. For the most part, the safeties had a pretty decent year while the cornerbacks had more than their share of ups and downs.

The most concern centers around veteran right cornerback Mel Blount, who may or may not be back next fall. Blount will be 36 years old in April. His age might have begun to catch up with him this past year as he was beaten long too many times.

Blount did have four interceptions, a fumble recovery for a touchdown and was 10th in tackles, but he may be hard pressed to win his starting job next fall, especially if the Steelers go for a cornerback with their first draft choice. Harvey Clayton and Sam Washington are possibilities to take over, but both are on the small side to be a consistently good corner in the NFL. Clayton was very effective as the nickel back in '83, a role he'll probably fill again in '84.

At the other corner, Dwayne Woodruff also had his shining moments and his moments when he looked like he couldn't stop anyone. While he's probably in no danger of losing his job (the Steelers still feel he's the best defensive back they've got), Woodruff's got to be more consistent. He did have three interceptions in '83 and was sixth on the team in tackles with 70.

Merriweather had big shoes to fill in Jack Ham's, but he did the job . . . and did it well.

As for the safeties, this is an area in pretty good shape. Donnie Shell came through with a big year at strong safety even after everyone had written him off during his holdout in training camp. Shell will be 32 years old in the fall, but he played in 1983 like he was 22. Shell tied Rick Woods for the team lead in interceptions with five and was third in tackles behind Lambert and Merriweather with 90 (60 solos).

Free safety Woods developed into a promising player in '83, making good in his first chance at a regular job. Woods showed occasional ability to make the big plays, although he's far from reaching his full potential, according to many observers.

In addition to his five interceptions, Woods recovered two fumbles and was seventh in tackles with 61.

Ron Johnson lost his starting job to Woods and is likely to fill the same role as backup at both free and strong safety next fall. Johnson is still only 28 and could, with more consistent play, find his way back into a starting spot. Greg Best is the only other insurance at safety. The Steelers should definitely be looking for some help here in the draft. **Grade: C.**

CONCLUSION

It's not wise to mess with a good thing, and the Steeler defense was a pretty good one in 1983. But, like any good machine, tuneups are needed to make sure the quality performance continues. The Steelers could use a little help in the secondary and an extra body on the defensive line, no secrets to anyone. The linebackers are strong, especially if guys like Hinkle, Little and Bingham continue to develop.

The biggest key for the defense could be finding a defensive coordinator to carry on where Widenhofer left off. Widenhofer was one of the best and will be very difficult, if not impossible, to replace.

With Widenhofer around, Noll never had to worry about the defense. That might change in the future and the effects could be felt elsewhere.

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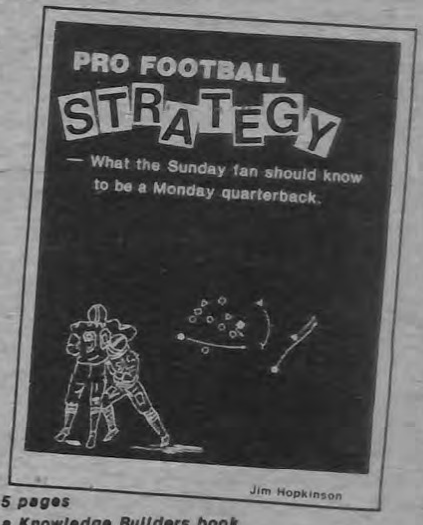

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'84 Schedule Preview . . .

Steelers Facing Grueling Road Grind

While the Dallas Cowboys have long been referred to as "America's Team," the Steelers might be a more appropriate recipient of that title come next fall based on their 1984 schedule, released recently by the National Football League.

Better yet, maybe the Steelers should adopt the slogan: Become a Pittsburgh Steeler and see the country.

The Steelers will see the country all right, several times over, in 1984. Fans of the defending AFC Central Division champions in nearly all parts of the country will have the opportunity to see their heros next fall. The Steelers seem destined to spend so much time in the air next season that maybe management should check into those mileage-plus gimmicks being offered by the various airlines. Whatever the criteria, the Steelers should qualify.

A look at next year's road schedule shows two visits to the West Coast for games against the Super Bowl champion Raiders and San Francisco 49ers. Additionally, the Steelers will hit the East Coast for games against the Jets in New Jersey and Colts in Baltimore. They'll also stop in the Deep South for a game against the Saints in New Orleans, and pay their yearly visit to the Southwest to meet the Oilers. There are also the annual journeys to Cincinnati and Cleveland, short jaunts, but always tough games.

There you have it. Just call them the jet-setting Steelers.

While the road portion of the '84 schedule could turn out to be an exercise in endurance, the home half is downright tough. In addition to their usual knock-down, drag-out affairs with division rivals the Bengals, Browns and Oilers, the Steelers will play host to Dan Marino and the Dolphins, San Diego, the Rams, Atlanta and Kansas City.

In all, the Steelers play four games against teams that qualified for the '83 playoffs (Dolphins, Rams, Raiders and 49ers). Only six games will be against teams with better than .500 records this past

In 1984, the Steeler defense will be tested by QB's Joe Montana and Steve Bartkowski . . .

. . . and by premier running backs such as Eric Dickerson and William Andrews.

fall, as the combined '83 slates of Pittsburgh's 1984 opponents was 120-136.

While, on paper, the Steelers appear to have a favorable 1984 schedule, first looks can be deceiving. Sure, the Bengals and Jets finished 7-9 in 1983 and the Chargers 6-10, but only because of injuries and other assorted problems. You can be sure that once the '84 campaign rolls around all three of those clubs will be mentioned as possible Super Bowl threats. Even Kansas City, Atlanta, New Orleans, Cleveland and the Colts are potential playoff teams. An easy 1984 for the Steelers? Not really.

"It is a trap to even think about looking ahead," Steeler coach Chuck Noll has said in the past. "You play who they tell you, when they tell you. There's nothing you can do about it anyway. You just show up ready to go."

Because of the NFL's rotation system, the 1984 season finds the AFC Central Division playing its crossover games against the NFC West, meaning the Steelers, Oilers, Bengals and Browns all have dates with San Francisco, the Rams, New Orleans and Atlanta. The Steelers and Oilers, in fact, play the exact same schedule. The Bengals' and Browns' schedules differ slightly, with dates against Buffalo, Seattle, New England and Denver instead of the Raiders, Jets, Chargers and Miami.

Of the 13 different teams the Steelers will face in '84, they hold a lifetime advantage over eight of them. Pittsburgh holds the series edge against Cincinnati (16-11), Houston (21-8), San Diego (7-3), Kansas City (8-3), Atlanta (5-1), the Jets (7-0), Baltimore (9-3) and New Orleans (4-3), but trails Cleveland (29-39), Miami (3-4), the Rams (3-14-2), Raiders (5-9) and 49ers (5-6).

Still, when you get right down to it, how much sense does it make to start looking ahead to games scheduled to be played eight and nine months from now. Little, if any, that's how much. In the NFL, situations change week-to-week and day-to-day. The Chargers of 1983 were a perfect example. With Dan Fouts, they're Super Bowl contenders. Without him, every game is a struggle, especially with that defense. Take the 49ers. If the game were played today, they'd probably be favored to beat the Steelers. But what if Joe Montana were to get injured the week before they played? Get the point?

Other factors that should be considered when previewing a schedule are whether the games are on Monday nights, or Thursday nights, weather conditions and travel. The exact dates for the '84 season will be announced sometime in April.

As for the rest of the AFC, the toughest schedule could belong to San Diego. The Chargers will have a difficult time rebounding from their 1983 troubles with an '84 schedule that includes nine games against playoff teams. San Diego will meet division foes the Raiders, Seahawks and Broncos twice, plus go against the Dolphins, Steelers and Lions. In addition, the Chargers play Green Bay, Chicago, Minnesota, the Jets and Kansas City (twice). Don Coryell better hope for another strong defensive draft.

Perhaps the weakest AFC schedule belongs to the Colts, who meet just three playoff teams (the Dolphins twice and the Steelers).

If anything, Pittsburgh's 1984 schedule will serve as a warning to Steeler defensive backs to be prepared. That's because they'll be facing some of the best throwers in the game, like Ken Anderson, Richard Todd, Jim Plunkett, Joe Montana, Dan Marino, Dan Fouts, Vince Ferragamo and Steve Bartkowski, not to mention Warren Moon, should he sign with Houston. On top of that, the Steelers must prepare for runners like Eric Dickerson, William Andrews, George Rogers, Marcus Allen, Freeman McNeil, Wendell Tyler, Curtis Dickey, Pete Johnson and Earl Campbell. Maybe Chuck Noll should start looking ahead, just a little bit.

Strength Of Schedules

Team, '83 record	'83 record for '84 foes	Pct.
AFC EAST		
Miami, 12-4	129-126-1	.506
New England, 8-8	141-114-1	.553
Buffalo, 8-8	141-114-1	.553
Baltimore, 7-9	139-116-1	.545
N.Y. Jets, 7-9	115-140-1	.451
AFC CENTRAL		
Pittsburgh, 10-6	120-136	.469
Cleveland, 9-7	119-137	.465
Cincinnati, 7-9	123-133	.480
Houston, 2-14	136-120	.531
AFC WEST		
L.A. Raiders, 12-4	124-132	.484
Seattle, 9-7	131-125	.512
Denver, 9-7	130-126	.508
San Diego, 6-10	136-120	.531
Kansas City, 6-10	119-136-1	.467

Team, '83 record	'83 record for '84 foes	Pct.
NFC EAST		
Washington, 14-2	125-127-4	.496
Dallas, 12-4	128-124-4	.508
St. Louis, 8-7-1	136-118-2	.535
Philadelphia, 5-11	143-109-4	.566
N.Y. Giants, 3-12-1	129-125-2	.508
NFC CENTRAL		
Detroit, 9-7	124-132	.484
Green Bay, 8-8	127-128-1	.498
Chicago, 8-8	127-128-1	.498
Minnesota, 8-8	126-130	.492
Tampa Bay, 2-14	119-135-2	.469
NFC WEST		
San Francisco, 10-6	117-138-1	.459
L.A. Rams, 9-7	119-135-2	.469
New Orleans, 8-8	121-133-2	.477
Atlanta, 7-9	123-132-1	.482

1984 Opponents -- Home and Away

(1983 scores listed where applicable; "X" indicates teams did not play)

BALTIMORE COLTS

HOME

7	Miami	21
12	New England	7
7	Buffalo	30
6	New York Jets	10
13	Pittsburgh	24
X	San Diego	X
X	St. Louis	X
X	Washington	X

AWAY

0	Miami	37
29	New England	23
23	Buffalo	28
17	New York Jets	14
20	Houston	10
X	Dallas	X
X	Los Angeles Raiders	X
X	Philadelphia	X

BUFFALO BILLS

HOME

0	Miami	12
0	New England	31
28	Baltimore	23
10	New York Jets	34
X	Cleveland	X
X	Dallas	X
X	Denver	X
X	Philadelphia	X

AWAY

38	Miami	35
7	New England	21
30	Baltimore	7
24	New York Jets	17
10	Cincinnati	6
X	Seattle	X
X	St. Louis	X
X	Washington	X

CINCINNATI BENGALS

HOME

28	Cleveland	21
14	Pittsburgh	24
38	Houston	10
6	Buffalo	10
15	Kansas City	20
X	Atlanta	X
X	Los Angeles Rams	X
X	Seattle	X

AWAY

7	Cleveland	17
23	Pittsburgh	10
55	Houston	14
17	Denver	24
X	New England	X
X	New Orleans	X
X	New York Jets	X
X	San Francisco	X

CLEVELAND BROWNS

HOME

31	Pittsburgh	17
17	Cincinnati	7
25	Houston	19
10	New York Jets	7
6	Denver	27
30	New England	0
X	New Orleans	X
X	San Francisco	X

AWAY

17	Pittsburgh	44
21	Cincinnati	28
27	Houston	34
9	Seattle	24
X	Los Angeles Rams	X
X	Atlanta	X
X	Buffalo	X
X	Kansas City	X

DENVER BRONCOS

HOME

7	Los Angeles Raiders	22
38	Seattle	27
27	Kansas City	24
14	San Diego	6
24	Cincinnati	17
*X	Dallas	X
X	Minnesota	X
X	New England	X

AWAY

20	Los Angeles Raiders	22
19	Seattle	27
7	San Diego	31
17	Kansas City	48
27	Cleveland	6
X	Buffalo	X
X	Chicago	X
X	Detroit	X

HOUSTON OILERS

HOME

34	Cleveland	27
28	Pittsburgh	40
14	Cincinnati	55
10	Baltimore	20
6	Los Angeles Raiders	20
X	New Orleans	X
X	New York Jets	X
X	San Francisco	X

AWAY

19	Cleveland	25
10	Pittsburgh	17
10	Cincinnati	38
10	Kansas City	13
17	Miami	24
X	Los Angeles Rams	X
X	Atlanta	X
X	San Diego	X

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

HOME

20	Los Angeles Raiders	28
48	Denver	17
17	Seattle	13
14	San Diego	17
13	Houston	10
X	Cleveland	X
X	New York Jets	X
X	Tampa Bay	X

AWAY

20	Los Angeles Raiders	21
24	Denver	27
48	Seattle	51
38	San Diego	41
20	Cincinnati	15
38	New York Giants	17
X	Pittsburgh	X
X	New York Jets	X

LOS ANGELES RAIDERS

HOME

21	Seattle	34
22	Denver	20
21	Kansas City	20
30	San Diego	14
X	Baltimore	X
X	Green Bay	X
X	Minnesota	X
X	Pittsburgh	X

AWAY

36	Seattle	38
22	Denver	7
28	Kansas City	20
42	San Diego	10
20	Houston	6
27	Miami	14
X	Chicago	X
X	Detroit	X

MIAMI DOLPHINS

HOME

34	New England	24
35	Buffalo	38
37	Baltimore	0
34	New York Jets	14
24	Houston	17
14	Los Angeles Raiders	27
X	Dallas	X
X	Philadelphia	X

AWAY

6	New England	17
12	Buffalo	0
21	Baltimore	7
32	New York Jets	14
X	Pittsburgh	X
X	San Diego	X
X	St. Louis	X
X	Washington	X

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

HOME

17	Miami	6
23	Baltimore	29
21	Buffalo	7
23	New York Jets	13
6	Seattle	24
X	Cincinnati	X
X	St. Louis	X
X	Washington	X

AWAY

24	Miami	34
31	Buffalo	0
7	Baltimore	12
3	New York Jets	26
0	Cleveland	30
X	Dallas	X
X	Denver	X
X	Philadelphia	X

NEW YORK JETS

HOME

14	Miami	32
26	New England	3
17	Buffalo	24
14	Baltimore	17
7	Pittsburgh	34
X	Cincinnati	X
X	Kansas City	X
X	New York Giants	X

AWAY

14	Miami	34
13	New England	23
34	Buffalo	10
10	Baltimore	6
7	Cleveland	10
X	Houston	X
X	Kansas City	X
X	Tampa Bay	X

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

HOME

44	Cleveland	17
10	Cincinnati	23
17	Houston	10
26	San Diego	3
X	Atlanta	X
X	Kansas City	X
X	Miami	X
X	Los Angeles Rams	X

AWAY

17	Cleveland	31
24	Cincinnati	14
40	Houston	28
24	Baltimore	13
34	New York Jets	7
X	Los Angeles Raiders	X
X	New Orleans	X
X	San Francisco	X

SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

HOME

10	Los Angeles Raiders	42
31	Denver	7
28	Seattle	21
41	Kansas City	38
X	Chicago	X
X	Detroit	X
X	Houston	X
X	Miami	X

AWAY

14	Los Angeles Raiders	30
6	Denver	14
31	Seattle	34
17	Kansas City	14
3	Pittsburgh	26
X	Baltimore	X
X	Green Bay	X
X	Minnesota	X

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

HOME

38	Los Angeles Raiders	36
27	Denver	19
51	Kansas City	48
34	San Diego	31
24	Cleveland	9
X	Buffalo	X
X	Chicago	X
X	Detroit	X

AWAY

34	Los Angeles Raiders	21
27	Denver	38
13	Kansas City	17
21	San Diego	26
24	New England	6
X	Cincinnati	X
X	Green Bay	X
X	Minnesota	X

ATLANTA FALCONS

HOME

28	San Francisco	24
13	Los Angeles Rams	36
17	New Orleans	19
24	Philadelphia	28
30	Detroit	14
13	New York Giants	16
X	Cleveland	X
X	Houston	X

AWAY

20	San Francisco	24
21	Los Angeles Rams	27
10	New Orleans	27
21	Washington	37
X	Minnesota	X
X	Tampa Bay	X
X	Pittsburgh	X
X	Cincinnati	X

CHICAGO BEARS

HOME

17	Detroit	38
23	Green Bay	21
14	Minnesota	23
17	Tampa Bay	10
31	Denver	10
31	New Orleans	34
X	Dallas	X
X	Los Angeles Raiders	X

AWAY

17	Detroit	31
28	Green Bay	31
19	Minnesota	13
27	Tampa Bay	0
14	Los Angeles Rams	21
X	St. Louis	X
X	Seattle	X
X	San Diego	X

DALLAS COWBOYS

HOME

10	Washington	31
37	Philadelphia	7
35	St. Louis	17
28	New York Giants	13
21	New Orleans	20
X	Green Bay	X
X	Baltimore	X
X	New England	X

AWAY

31	Washington	30
27	Philadelphia	20
34	St. Louis	17
38	New York Giants	20
X	Los Angeles Rams	X
X	Chicago	X
X	Miami	X
X	Buffalo	X

DETROIT LIONS

HOME

38	Green Bay	14
31	Chicago	17
13	Minnesota	2
23	Tampa Bay	20
X	Philadelphia	X
X	San Francisco	X
X	Los Angeles Raiders	X
X	Denver	X

AWAY

23	Green Bay	20
38	Chicago	17
17	Minnesota	20
17	Tampa Bay	0
17	Washington	38
14	Atlanta	30
X	Seattle	X
X	San Diego	X

GREEN BAY PACKERS

HOME

20	Detroit	23
17	Minnesota	20
31	Chicago	28
55	Tampa Bay	14
27	Los Angeles Rams	24
X	St. Louis	X
X	Seattle	X
X	San Diego	X

AWAY

14	Detroit	38
29	Minnesota	21
21	Chicago	23
12	Tampa Bay	9
X	Dallas	X
X	New Orleans	X
X	Los Angeles Raiders	X
X	Denver	X

LOS ANGELES RAMS

HOME

35	San Francisco	45
30	New Orleans	27
27	Atlanta	21
21	Chicago	14
16	New York Giants	6
X	Dallas	X
X	Cleveland	X
X	Houston	X

AWAY

10	San Francisco	7
26	New Orleans	24
36	Atlanta	13
24	Green Bay	27
X	St. Louis	X
X	Tampa Bay	X
X	Pittsburgh	X
X	Cincinnati	X

MINNESOTA VIKINGS

HOME

20	Detroit	17
21	Green Bay	29
13	Chicago	19
12	Tampa Bay	17
X	Washington	X
X	Atlanta	X
X	Seattle	X
X	San Diego	X

AWAY

2	Detroit	13
20	Green Bay	17
23	Chicago	14
19	Tampa Bay	16
17	San Francisco	48
X	Philadelphia	X
X	Los Angeles Raiders	X
X	Denver	X

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

HOME

13	San Francisco	32
24	Los Angeles Rams	26
27	Atlanta	10
28	St. Louis	17
24	Tampa Bay	21
17	Miami	7
21	Buffalo	17
X	Green Bay	X

AWAY

0	San Francisco	27
27	Los Angeles Rams	30
19	Atlanta	17
20	Dallas	21
34	Chicago	31
0	New England	7
X	New York Giants	X
X	Baltimore	X

NEW YORK GIANTS

HOME

17	Washington	33
20	Dallas	38
6	St. Louis	10
13	Philadelphia	17
17	Kansas City	38
X	San Francisco	X
X	New Orleans	X
X	Tampa Bay	X

AWAY

22	Washington	31
13	Dallas	28
20	St. Louis	20
23	Philadelphia	0
6	Los Angeles Rams	16
16	Atlanta	13
X	Tampa Bay	X
X	New York Jets	X

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

HOME

13	Washington	23
20	Dallas	27
11	St. Louis	14
0	New York Giants	23
22	San Francisco	17
21	Baltimore	22
X	Minnesota	X
X	New England	X

AWAY

24	Washington	28
7	Dallas	37
7	St. Louis	31
17	New York Giants	13
28	Atlanta	24
X	Detroit	X
X	Miami	X
X	Buffalo	X

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

HOME

14	Washington	38
17	Dallas	34
31	Philadelphia	17
20	New York Giants	20
X	Los Angeles Rams	X
X	Chicago	X
X	Miami	X
X	Buffalo	X

AWAY

7	Washington	45
17	Dallas	35
14	Philadelphia	11
10	New York Giants	6
17	New Orleans	28
X	Green Bay	X
X	New England	X
X	Baltimore	X

SAN FRANCICSO 49ERS

HOME

7	Los Angeles Rams	10
27	New Orleans	0
24	Atlanta	20
X	Washington	X
48	Minnesota	17
35	Tampa Bay	21
X	Pittsburgh	X
X	Cincinnati	X

AWAY

45	Los Angeles Rams	35
32	New Orleans	13
24	Atlanta	28
17	Philadelphia	22
X	Detroit	X
X	New York Giants	X
X	Cleveland	X
X	Houston	X

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

HOME

0	Detroit	11
9	Green Bay	12
0	Chicago	27
16	Minnesota	19
X	Los Angeles Rams	X
X	Atlanta	X
X	New York Giants	X
X	New York Jets	X

AWAY

20	Detroit	23
14	Green Bay	55
10	Chicago	17
17	Minnesota	12
21	San Francisco	35
21	New Orleans	24
X	New York Giants	X
X	Kansas City	X

WASHINGTON REDSKINS

HOME

30	Dallas	31
45	St. Louis	7
28	Philadelphia	24
31	New York Giants	22
37	Atlanta	21
38	Detroit	7
X	Miami	X
X	Buffalo	X

AWAY

31	Dallas	10
38	St. Louis	14
23	Philadelphia	13
33	New York Giants	17
X	San Francisco	X
X	Minnesota	X
X	New England	X
X	Baltimore	X

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Steeler Scrapbook

Mandich's Stay Short But Sweet

BY TIM SASSONE

You won't find his name in the 1978 Steeler media guide, or included with the likes of Lynn Swann and John Stallworth in that year's final receiving statistics. But Jim Mandich, the personable tight end who was a key figure for Miami in the early 1970s when the Dolphins were the toast of the NFL, was indeed a member of the Steelers for the better part of the '78 season. And he's got the proof -- a championship ring from Super Bowl XIII.

"I wear that ring many times with a great deal of pride," says Mandich, who today is back in Miami where he's involved in the construction industry. "I have nothing but warm memories of Pittsburgh, the organization, the players and coach Noll. It's got to be one of my favorite places in the world."

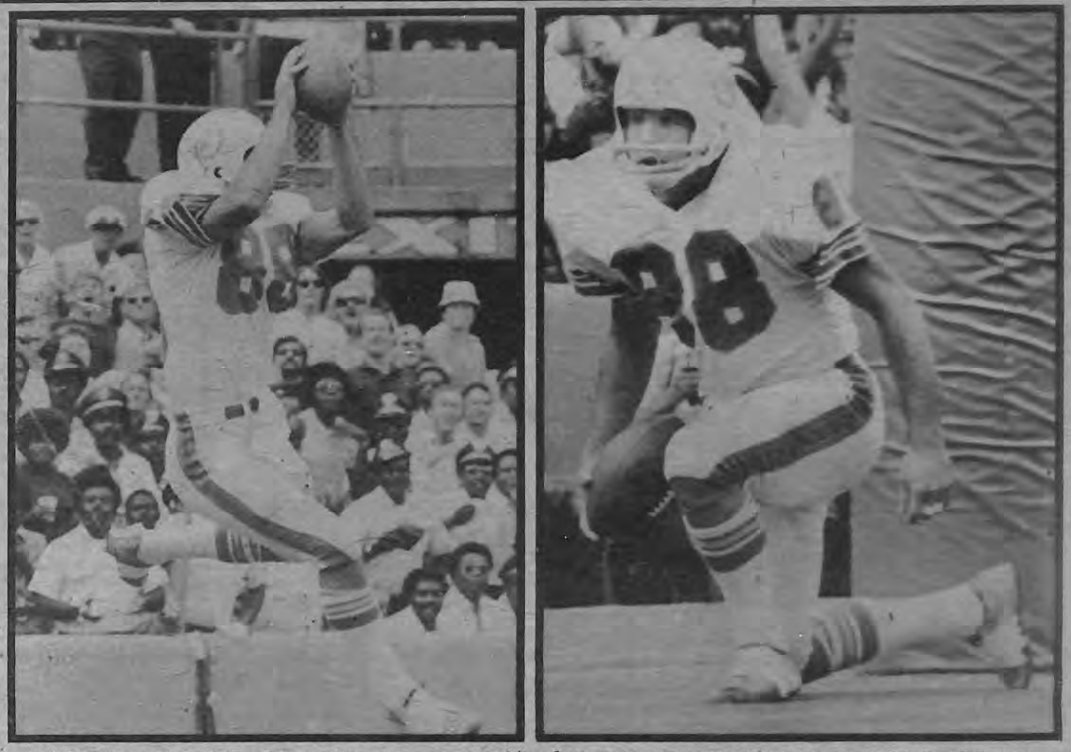
For eight seasons, from 1970 through 1977, Mandich was Miami's big-play tight end. The Dolphins' second-round draft choice out of the University of Michigan in 1970, Mandich played behind Marv Fleming for three years before assuming the starting job in 1973. That was the year Miami went to its third straight Super Bowl and won the world title for the second time in a row.

Acrobatic, gymnastic, clutch. Those were a few of the words used to describe the way Mandich went about catching passes. "He just continues to make pressure plays for us," Miami coach Don Shula once said. "He has done that right from the beginning."

Mandich caught 121 passes in eight years with the Dolphins for over 1,400 yards and 23 touchdowns, still the third highest total in Miami history behind Nat Moore and Paul Warfield. (One of every five passes Mandich caught was for a touchdown.) His best year was 1974 when he caught 33 passes for 374 yards and six touchdowns. From 1972 through 1976, Mandich never missed a game.

After the 1977 season in Miami, Mandich was traded to Washington. He never did play a down for the Redskins, who waived him after he recovered from an ankle injury suffered in training camp. With his football career apparently behind him, Mandich was at home in Miami when he got a call from the Dallas Cowboys.

"It was the second week of the season and Jay Saldi had torn his knee and looked to be out for the season," Mandich recalled. "Tom Landry brought Jackie Smith and me to Dallas for a tryout and decided to keep Smith. I was pretty depressed after that."



While Mandich failed to catch a pass as a Steeler, one of every five he caught for Miami was for a touchdown.

Meanwhile, in Pittsburgh, the Steelers were off to their best start ever. They had won five straight to begin the season and were entertaining Atlanta in Three Rivers Stadium. The Steelers won the game for their sixth straight, but lost starting tight end Bennie Cunningham with a knee injury that would sideline him for the season.

With no one capable of backing up Randy Grossman, the Steelers went shopping for tight ends and settled on Mandich. Although he didn't catch a pass and seldom played because of the great season Grossman had, Mandich contributed on the special teams and, all things considered, was a pretty valuable guy to have around.

For Mandich, the real kicker came in the Super Bowl against Dallas. With the Steelers ahead 21-14 in the third quarter, the Cowboys missed a chance to tie the score when Jackie Smith dropped a sure touchdown pass in the endzone. The same Jackie Smith Dallas had decided to keep ahead of Mandich. The Cowboys had to settle for a field goal, never to get that close again as the Steelers won 35-31.

"I guess you could find some kind of justice in that," Mandich says with a laugh.

"That was such an upbeat way I really get a little misty thinking about it. They're special people."

While Mandich admits it was tough to leave the Dolphins after so many successful seasons, he says he couldn't have landed in a better place than Pittsburgh.

"Winning takes care of a lot of problems," he said. "We were winning, Terry Bradshaw was having a banner year, and the way I was treated made me feel special. There was such a cohesiveness between the team and the community and I was made to feel part of it."

When Mandich looks back on his football career he knows he's fortunate to have played for two of the all-time great coaches in Shula and Noll. That's not even counting his collegiate years spent playing for Bo Schembechler at Michigan.

"Noll wasn't as emotional as Shula, and I don't mean that to be negative," Mandich said. "Coach Noll was marvelously organized and firm. You knew where you stood with him at all times. It's easy to see why those two have been so successful over the years."

If you blinked long enough in the fall of 1978, you might have missed Jim Mandich's stay in Pittsburgh. If you did, you missed a class act.

to leave pro football," Mandich said of his Super Bowl experience with the Steelers. "For me it was special because the game was played in Miami, we won it and it turned out to be the last football game I played."

Although the Steelers released Mandich after his brief stay in Pittsburgh, there were no hard feelings. In fact, Mandich said he'll never forget the way he was treated by the organization and by the Rooneys in particular.

"I had a clause in my contract that stipulated I had to take part in a certain number of plays to get an extra $10,000," Mandich said. "I didn't even come close to qualifying for it, but a month or two after the season I got a note from the Rooneys and a check for $10,000. The note said something like we didn't count the number of plays, but the contribution you made to the team is appreciated. I'll never forget that."

Like so many of the other players who've played in Pittsburgh, Mandich is quick to point out that there aren't many owners in sports like Art Rooney Sr.

"Mr. Rooney would walk through the clubhouse every day to say hello to everyone," Mandich said. "The Rooney family is such a super bunch of people, human people.

AFC Central Wrap-up

Johnson Wants New Pact

McDonald -- needs playing time.

Earl -- wants new address.

Johnson -- trying to renegotiate.

CINCINNATI: While some people might be ready to push the panic button over the USFL's incursions into NFL rosters, one of the guys who's been harmed the most, Bengal assistant general manager Mike Brown, remained one of the calmest people around. Brown, whose team has already lost the services of tight end Dan Ross, linebackers Jim LeClair and Tom Dinkel and guard Dave Lapham for the '84 season and faces the loss of Cris Collinsworth in 1985, says the future of the USFL is actually no future at all. "Eventually, economic law will prevail," he says of the USFL's free-spending ways. "There will be a return to reason. People are not going to stay in business losing money indefinitely, even if they get their names in the papers." Despite the long litany of losses -- the Bengals also lost their most valuable assistant coach, offensive coordinator Lindy Infante -- just three days before the opening of training camp last year, Brown remains confident that the Bengals, who have two of the first seven picks in the upcoming draft, including the first pick overall, will remain competitive. "We don't lose Collinsworth until after next year," he points out. "If the USFL were to fold, he would be back to play again the following year. As for Dan Ross, a headline last week said his agent is trying to get him out of his contract, that he doesn't want to play in New Orleans. We did lose Dave Lapham, a 33-year-old guard. Jim LeClair is a 35-year-old middle linebacker. He's getting near the end of his career. Glenn Cameron (also rumored to be heading for the USFL) is going to law school. I even wrote a recommendation for him. Dinkel was a free agent last year and we signed him. This year, we didn't." Brown called the current times in professional football "turbulent," but also said that he finds them exciting, even though the competition from the rival league is sure to cause him some sleepless nights. "It's going to be competitive," he concluded. "I've never seen so many different ways for us to go. But I think we will be able to handle it." . . . Ross, who now seems to have little PR value to the new league, since the former Boston franchise is now in New Orleans, is indeed trying to get out of his contract with the Breakers. Agent Tom Toner said recently that he has found an NFL team that is willing to pay Ross the $1.5 million for four years that the Breakers have signed him to. However, the team is not the Bengals, and, for Ross to return to the NFL, the Bengals would have to work out a deal with another NFL team, dealing away the rights to Ross. According to latest reports, the two teams interested in acquiring Ross are the Washington Redskins and the New England Patriots. The Bengals, however, seem reluctant to part with Ross, although if the bidding got as high as a No. 1 draft pick, they might become more interested in adding to their already-large draft booty which includes two picks in this year's first round and two in the first round of the 1985 draft also . . . It's hardly news when fullback Pete Johnson wants to renegotiate his contract, and he's once again waging his yearly war for more bucks. Johnson said at the Super Bowl that his negotiations with the Bengals have hit a snag, and that the Bengals are willing to pay him only half of what he's asking for the '84 season. The Bengals are offering to renegotiate a pact that would earn Johnson in the area of $200,000 next year; Johnson wants $400,000. If the Bengals can't do better, he says, he'd prefer to "buy out" the final year of his contract. Asked where he'd prefer to play, Johnson replied tersely, "Where the money is." Usually, that translates into the USFL, and Johnson's agent, Jack Childers, says he's had some talks with the New Jersey Generals, who've already signed LeClair and Lapham, and that the Generals are very interested in Johnson. Part of Johnson's problems with the Bengals seems to stem from his relationship with Mike Brown, who negotiates the player contracts. "If Mike Brown wasn't there, I'd play for $100,000 next year," Johnson said. Brown, familiar with Johnson's negotiations in the past, hasn't been surprised by any of the talk coming from Childers or Johnson. Of Childers, he says, "He's a hard bargainer. He looks to assert whatever leverage he can come up with, whether it's within the rules or not." . . . First-year head coach Sam Wyche completed his coaching staff by hiring as aides Joe Faragelli (quarterbacks and tight ends), Jim Anderson (running backs), Bill Urbanik (defensive line) and Trent Walters (defensive backfield) . . . Bengals reportedly have opened talks with Brigham Young quarterback Steve Young, expected to be their first pick in the draft. Young, however, does not have an agent yet, and that has slowed matters somewhat.

CLEVELAND: Ron Brown, the Browns' first draft pick last year, has opened his bid for an Olympic birth, and, from all indications, football is the farthest thing from his mind. "I'm really going to concentrate on preparing for the Olympics," said Brown who turned down a contract that was reported to be in the $900,000 range. "Before, I was taking it meet-by-meet," said Brown of his Olympic hopes, "but now I'm getting really serious about the whole thing." And, it seems less and less serious about a career in the NFL. Cleveland officials have said that they don't hold out much hope of Brown ever wearing a Browns uniform . . . Cuyahoga County officials have unveiled a plan for a new domed stadium in Cleveland and those plans have not only won the support of the Cleveland City Council, but also the support of Browns owner Art Modell. "I civicly cry out for the dome as one single catalyst that can turn the city upside down," said Modell recently. "In my 23 years in Cleveland, I haven't seen any other project that has the dynamics of this one. I'm convinced that it can turn the city around. Other domes in other cities have had a ripple effect. This dome could give Cleveland the opportunity to launch itself into the 21st Century." Modell says the domed facility could be used for up to 300 events per year. He foresees Cleveland Stadium being razed and the 29 acres it occupies being utilized for apartments, condominiums, hotels and businesses and other projects that would help to revitalize the city. The Browns are landlords of Cleveland Stadium and have 15 years left on their present lease. However, Modell foresees no problems, he says, in working that out if the domed stadium becomes a reality . . . Browns will begin an extensive weight training program in March under the direction of weight coach Dave Redding. This will be the third year for the team's offseason weight program, and each year it has shown an increase in participants. This year, some 41 Browns will report for the program, which runs through early July. "The success of the program," says Redding, "depends on the total participation and involvement of the players. To demand more of yourself than most people demand of you is what pays the ultimate dividends and what will make this 1984 program for the Browns a tremendous success." Out-of-town team members will also be brought to Cleveland several times during the offseason for evaluation and workout under Redding's guidance . . . Browns admit that, while they expect inside linebacker Dick Ambrose to come back strong after missing most of the season with a broken leg, that youngsters Eddie Johnson and Scott Nicolas will give him a run for the starting inside berth opposite Tom Cousineau. "I think it's going to be a heckuva race in training camp," said Sam Rutigliano . . . Browns, who never seem to be able to acquire the dominant pass-rushing defensive end that they so desperately need to really make their defense top-notch, are even looking at some free agents as possible remedies. Tops on the list of people they're interested in is Gary Jeter of the Rams. The former New York Giant became a free agent on February 1, and the Cleveland native says he wouldn't mind playing in his hometown . . . Browns are also looking to trade up in the draft, hoping to land either dominant defensive lineman or speedy wide receiver. Sam Rutigliano says there are no untouchables on the Browns' roster, although it would take a great deal to get someone like Chip Banks, Cousineau, Ozzie Newsome, Mike Pruitt or Clay Matthews. Browns are said to be eyeing Penn State receiver Kenny Jackson as a possible first-rounder. Jackson has also returned kicks during his career, which makes him doubly attractive for Browns . . . Former Browns offensive lineman Mike McCormick, currently the president and general manager of the Seattle Seahawks, was elected to the Hall of Fame, becoming the 11th former Brown to be so honored . . . Brown family mourned the loss of former vice president and consultant Nate Wallack . . . Rutigliano recently noted that, if Paul McDonald had been left at the helm of the Browns, he probably would have worked his way through some of the problems that made him a disappointment in 1983. However, Rutigliano said the Browns didn't have the luxury of doing that, because they were only a 5-5 team at the time and battling for a playoff spot. McDonald agrees. "The one thing I lack and need is playing time," he says. "You get better each game, that's how you improve. But I've never really had the chance to do that here yet. There have only been a couple of games in which I've played back-to-back. I'm looking forward to getting the chance to play regularly and to progress. I have a lot to learn here, yet I

(continued on page 22)

NFL CONFIDENTIAL

Buckle your seat belts for a wild off-season. Pro football simply isn't going to go away this spring.

There'll be the USFL and negotiations and renegotiations and Donald Trump and all sorts of nonsense. It'll keep pro football on the sports pages all during the off-season.

One situation to watch closely will be the negotiations between Redskin owner Jack Kent Cooke and quarterback Joe Theismann. Theismann doesn't bother to deal with general manager Bobby Beathard. He goes directly to Cooke.

Theismann's contract isn't up, but he wants to renegotiate because his $400,000-a-year pact has been dwarfed by the million-dollar signings going on in the last year.

Theismann refused to talk about the contract situation during the playoffs. He said he and Cooke had an agreement to discuss it in the off-season.

But Theismann showed how serious he was about the situation when he exploded at Jimmy the Greek after the Redskin playoff game with the Los Angeles Rams.

The Greek, who is noted for simply dreaming up things, announced that Cooke had doubled Theismann's salary. When Theismann was asked about this on the air after the game, he deflected the question by saying, "That's not enough."

It was a different story after the game. Theismann fired off a telegram to CBS in New York, saying that he wasn't wild about cooperating with CBS anymore in view of The Greek's comments.

The Greek quickly backed down and explained that what he meant to say was that Cooke had decided to double his salary. Theismann continues to insist they haven't talked figures.

Theismann likes the red light of the camera too much not to cooperate with CBS, but the telegram showed how seriously he's taking the matter.

The question now is whether Cooke will gracefully agree to tear up Theismann's contract and give up the $1 million a year figure he wants. Theismann may even ask for a few other perks. He publishes his own Redskin newspaper and might want to use the season ticket list for a mailing list.

Since the Redskins have no replacement for Theismann -- Bob Holly is not to be confused with Gary Hogeboom -- Cooke is likely to give the quarterback a fat new contract.

The Greek, of course, will then say that he knew it all along.

* * *

There's a lot of buzzing in Denver these days now that John Hadl has departed as offensive coordinator. Hadl served as a sort of buffer between Dan Reeves and young quarterback John Elway.

To put it mildly, Elway and Reeves don't get along too well. They were even screaming on the sidelines at each other in San Diego. There's a definite communication problem. Reeves has a short fuse and Elway is used to having his own way.

Without Hadl to smooth things over, Elway and Reeves could have more rocky times. It's not going to help that the AFC West is becoming a very, very tough division.

Elway might be at odds with Reeves without Hadl to serve as buffer.

Mackovic -- not exactly well-received by his coaching colleagues.

The Raiders are the Raiders, Chuck Knox now has turned Seattle into a playoff team and San Diego is dangerous when Dan Fouts is healthy.

Reeves is so frustrated that the word is he'd even like to deal Elway, but owner Edgar Kaiser would never put up with that.

Reeves knows that if it comes down to a showdown between him and Elway, he'll be the one to go.

But, look for fireworks between these two competitive men in the future.

* * *

Lyle Alzado got a lot of publicity during the recent playoffs telling a story about how coach Sam Rutigliano told Brian Sipe to use a running play in the last minute of the team's 1980 playoff loss to the Raiders. Alzado was then in Cleveland. Alzado said Sipe changed the play, threw a pass and it was intercepted by Mike Davis to get the Raiders rolling to the Super Bowl.

Now there's just one thing wrong with that tale.

NFL Films had a mike on Rutigliano that day and in the team's highlight film, they ran a clip of Rutigliano giving Sipe the pass play.

Oh, well, it still made a great story for Alzado.

* * *

Joe Robbie, among other NFL people, wants to go to war with the USFL.

The Miami Dolphin owner says that at the winter meetings in March, he'll propose that the NFL move up its draft to January next year to go head-to-head with the USFL draft.

The NFL got a provision written into the bargaining agreement with the NFLPA giving them the right to move up the draft, but the owners voted the idea down this year.

The majority of the owners still feel that the majority of the players who wait for the NFL draft with sign with the NFL. Of the top 150 picks last year in the NFL, 143 signed with the senior league. By waiting, a team generally doesn't have to worry about losing its first-round draft pick.

But Robbie doesn't agree with this logic.

"I've been in favor of an earlier draft all along," he said. "I intend to push for it in March. Then, if the prices get too high and the USFL starts to feel the pressure, well..."

Robbie obviously implied that the NFL could use its financial muscle to overwhelm the USFL.

But, as long as there are USFL owners like Donald Trump around, the USFL will sign some players.

But, this debate will continue to rage in the halls of the NFL.

* * *

John Mackovic isn't exactly winning friends and influencing people in his first year as Kansas City coach.

He's definitely ruffled more than a few feathers.

Two of his division rivals, Seattle and Denver, are both furious at him.

Denver coach Dan Reeves is irate because he felt Mackovic ran up the score on him when he was still passing late in a 41-10 victory over the Broncos.

Seattle is upset because he made a conditional trade for running back Sherman Smith and then announced that Smith had flunked the physical because of a neck problem nobody had noticed. Smith then went on and played in San Diego.

What happened is that Mackovic found out he could get Jewerl Thomas from the Rams, so he no longer wanted -- or needed -- Smith. But his rivals didn't feel it was kosher for him to back out of a deal by claiming a player had flunked a physical. These things can come back to haunt a team.

Clubs aren't too eager to deal with Mackovic now.

* * *

Is it a coincidence that the Pittsburgh Maulers play their first home game in March against Birmingham?

Since some people contend that Cliff Stoudt had his ticket written for Birmingham halfway through the season, the USFL may have wanted to give him a "homecoming."

The Maulers may sell a few tickets to Steeler fans who want to come out and boo him one last time for old times sake.

* * *

The NFL might be putting on a pretty

(continued on page 23)

AFC . . .

(continued from page 20)

think I've learned a great deal already. But this game is an ongoing learning process. The more you play, the more you learn."

HOUSTON: It's been a hectic few weeks for first-year Oiler coach Hugh Campbell since being named field-boss in Houston. Campbell no sooner got the job than he was off for the various collegiate all-star games that are always a must for the pro staffs. Then, after ducking into Houston for a few days to interview prospective assistants, it was off to New Orleans for the NFL's three-day evaluation session for college seniors. "Actually," said Oiler PR director Bob Hyde, "Hugh hasn't had much chance to settle in here yet." That's probably an understatement. In fact, things have been so bad that Campbell's hardly had time to review films of last year's team, even though he's stated that as a priority. "I'd think he wants to get to them as soon as possible," said Hyde. "He's going to want to have a pretty good handle on our personnel from last year before we go into the draft." . . . It was uncertain whether or not Campbell would take advantage of the rule which allows rookie coaches to hold two minicamps during the offseason. However, most Oilers are counting on having to report twice for the evaluation and learning sessions. With a mostly-new staff, and new systems being installed, it's believed that Campbell will want every edge he can get . . . The Oilers' "other" Campbell, Earl, has yet to eyeball his new coach, but the meeting between the two has been much-awaited in Houston. Earl hasn't exactly been too kind to the Oiler organization, and, in recent days, has reiterated his desire to move on. Said general manager Ladd Herzeg just last week, "The way we're going to approach it is that if Earl is really unhappy here, and if his unhappiness will make him a less productive football player, and if we can get full value for him, we will trade him." Rumors still have Campbell earmarked for New Orleans, although Bum Phillips has staunchly denied that's the case. Another rumor has Campbell being shipped to the Dallas Cowboys for quarterback Danny White if the Oilers fail to sign free agent signal-caller Warren Moon . . . On the Moon front, Herzeg spent last week preparing various papers for Moon, including a prospectus on what outside fringe activities Moon could be involved in that might add to his coffers. Moon already owns several cookie shops in Edmonton and could be interested in developing similar businesses in Houston. Apparently, Moon has narrowed his choices to Houston and Seattle. And, even though Herzeg said that, in his mind, Moon was as good as "signed, sealed and delivered" to the Seahawks, it should also be noted that the Seahawks last week inked a new two-year deal with incumbent quarterback Dave Krieg, making their chances of getting Moon that much slimmer. Moon, in town for talks with Herzeg and Hugh Campbell, attended a Houston Rockets basketball game and got a nice ovation when introduced to the crowd. One thing that could hurt the Oilers in their bid to land Moon is that Moon has said he wants to talk to Earl Campbell before making any decision. If Campbell is overly critical of the Oiler organization, it could be fatal . . . Former Oiler head coach Ed Biles, a candidate for the defensive coordinator's job in Pittsburgh, has signed on as color man for Houston Gamblers broadcasts. Oilers also lost former business manager Lewis Mangum to the Gamblers . . . Herzeg refused to reveal which Oilers will be free agents on February 1, saying that he'd rather leave the USFL find out for themselves. "I'm not going to prepare a shopping list for the enemy," he said . . . It has been learned that Oiler wide receiver Tim Smith, last season's biggest --and most pleasant surprise -- is a free agent and that he's received some feelers from USFL clubs, although the Oilers will make a concerted effort to assure he remains with the team . . . Former Oiler defensive lineman Malcolm Taylor, a major disappointment for two seasons, reportedly got a guaranteed $550,000 contract for three seasons from the Chicago Blitz . . . Oilers added three assistants: Gene Gaines (special teams), Bruce Lemmerman (receivers) and Al Roberts (running backs) . . . Oiler coaching staff and scouts returned from NFL's three-day evaluation of college seniors much-impressed with some of the speedy receivers they saw. It's no secret the Oilers are looking to add some speed to their receiving corps, and, if he's available, Nebraska standout Irving Fryar would almost surely be their first selection . . . Oilers have seven picks in the first four rounds of the draft, and personnel director Mike Holovak, who's directed the last two excellent Oiler drafts, says he'll be attempting to "narrow the margin of error" even further this season. Regarded as one of the best talent scouts in the league, Holovak admits the Oiler needs are many entering 1984. "I don't know if we can single out any one area that we need to concentrate on more than another," he says. "We could use help everywhere. Some areas where we think we're strong, we need to start thinking about some backup help. There are other places where we may need to consider someone who could step right in and play for us." Holovak specifically pointed to the defensive line as an area where the Oilers would try to acquire immediate help. "When two fellas (Brian Sochia and Bob Hamm) can come in as rookie free agents and start, you know you need help there," he says. "In one way, we're happy, because it shows we have two fine football players there; but, in another way, it shows some veterans did not perform as good as they did the previous season." Holovak is one person who does not try to disguise his disgust for the USFL and what the league's done to the talent pool. "If it was for the better, I wouldn't mind, but it isn't," he says. "There's not much I can do to right it. My thoughts on the contracts they're signing people to haven't changed. I think it's a very dangerous situation. I don't have the answers. All I know is that my dad was a grocer and I was raised on the economics of keeping a business running for 30 years. You must have as much money coming in as you have going out over a number of years, and these clubs are operating on deficit budgets."

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Joe Theismann -- angry at CBS because of remarks over his contract.

NFL . . .

(continued from page 21)

good front when some of the owners say they're willing to sit back and let the USFL self-destruct, but there are growing indications that some NFL teams are beginning to fight back behind the scenes.

For instance, there's no doubt that the so-called USFL lottery that determined the draft order for the league's six expansion teams was hardly a lottery at all. In effect, what happened was that the Pittsburgh Maulers told league officials they were certain they could sign Mike Rozier, the Heisman Trophy winner.

The Maulers had several things going for them. First, Rozier was from Camden, New Jersey, not exactly around the corner from Pittsburgh, but not much more than a six-hour drive across the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Also, Rozier, who very nearly went to Pitt, was familiar with the city because of having been recruited four years ago by Pitt. And finally, Rozier was also somewhat familiar with Mauler coach Joe Pendry, who had been on the Pitt staff when Rozier was being recruited as a high school senior.

Oh, yeah, the Maulers had also determined that Rozier was the kind of kid who was in the chase for the money, as opposed to the type who might prefer to sit around and wait for the NFL draft. It didn't hurt that Rozier's agent, Mike Trope, was interested in procuring the struggling Washington Federal franchise. Were there league assurances that the team would come cheaper if Trope could deliver Rozier to the league? Perhaps.

However, the NFL, which used to look askance at those types of dealings, may have a few members who're willing to fight back with the same kind of tricks.

One big rumor has the San Diego Chargers making all kinds of deals to assure that they'll be able to draft Florida super linebacker Wilber Marshall, one of the top prospects in the draft. The Chargers have the sixth pick in the draft, and they're willing to pay Marshall's asking price -- which some say is as high as $1 million-a-year for four years. All they've got to do is make sure that the five clubs ahead of them -- Cincinnati, Houston, the Giants, Philadelphia and Kansas City -- don't select Marshall.

According to most of the rumors, the Chargers have Marshall's cooperation. It's just a matter of getting their league brethren to agree.

There was a time when the NFL would never allow such goings-on, but these are strange times, indeed, for America's No. 1 sport.

* * *

So, you thought good ol' Tampa Bay Buc head coach John McKay was just another misunderstood guy, right?

Well, during Super Bowl week, McKay proved that he's just as nasty as some of the printed stories make him out to be.

The Raiders were practicing at the Bucs' training site the week prior to the Super Bowl, when McKay, pulled up in his car only to find that there was already a rental car in his reserved parking spot.

As it turned out, the car belonged to one of the Raider assistant coaches. But, rather than walk the 20 or 30 yards to the practice field to ask whose car it was, McKay stormed into the Buc offices and ordered one of his aides to call the rental company and have the car towed.

One sweet guy, that McKay.

* * *

The turnaround that Bum Phillips has directed in New Orleans was probably one of the better stories of the NFL season. What makes the Saints' improvement even better, however, is the fact that the Saints are the lone team in the league that doesn't send scouts on the road throughout the year to check out collegiate talent.

Is Phillips worried about the skyrocketing price of scouting? Not really. Phillips prefers to let the scouting combine -- in his case, he's part of the 17-team National Combine -- do the legwork. His own people rarely leave New Orleans.

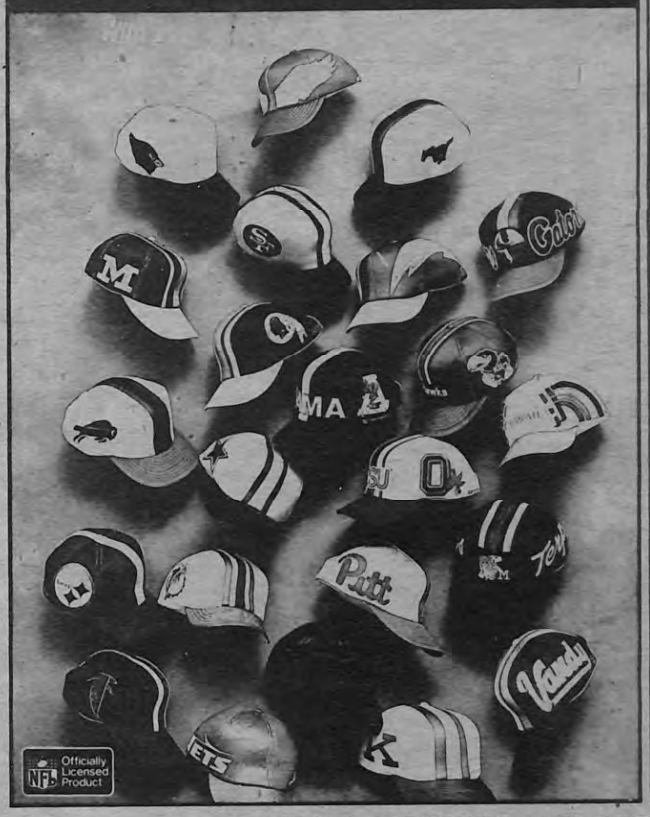
"The combine gets all the vital stats and gives us an opinion," Bum says. "Our scouts stay right in New Orleans and come to work every day and grade film. We have six scouts -- three grade offensively and three grade defensively. Then, at the end of the season, we switch them. Now we've got six opinions on everybody.

"Then we'll take our assistant coaches and assign each one five teams. Then, we'll take the position coaches, and they'll each grade the players at their particular positions. When we get all through with that, we have a pretty good bit about the draft."

That's all fine, except for one thing. By draft day, ol' Bum's usually so bored by the fifth or sixth round, that he's always ready to make a deal to unload his late-round choices and head for the golf course.

At least nobody's out there grading films of Bum's swing.

CAPture your team Spirit



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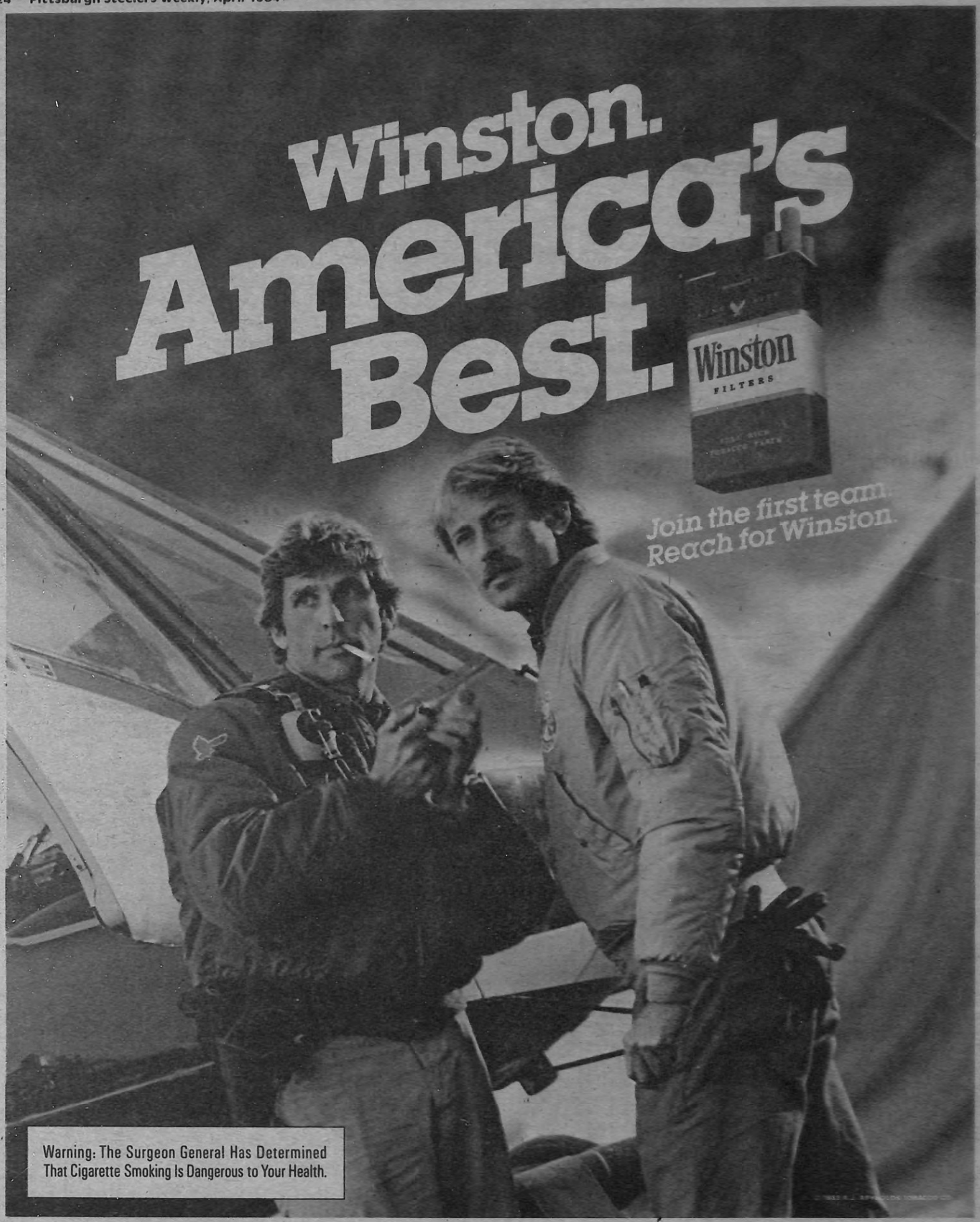

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